

# **Representations of Liverpool Exceptionalism in the Merseybeat period, 1960-1965.**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis takes John Belchem's defined concept of Liverpool Exceptionalism and tests it by application to the years 1960-1965 in Liverpool and specifically to the Merseybeat period. It uses two main resources – a substantial review of music newspapers written in the 1960s and an oral history with Liverpoolian musicians who were in Merseybeat groups in the 1960s.

This study of popular and/or collective memory suggests that any attempts to define Liverpool's supposed exceptionalism in restrictive terms are bound to be unsatisfactory. By taking a three-pronged approach, this thesis suggests that the United States played a crucial role in the creation and sustenance of a unique Liverpoolian identity in the Merseybeat period, though the causes of prominence of the United States within this formulation are only partially due to the city's port status. Liverpool's depiction as a place of deprivation was a strong contributory factor in sustaining the Liverpoolian identity from both within the city and in popular press coverage. Finally, the Irish influence on any collective identity was starting to become of declining influence in this period as well as suggesting that cosmopolitanism was in some places a restrictive factor in creating a broad Liverpoolian identity. Overall, this thesis offers a suggested correction to the concept of Liverpool Exceptionalism and demonstrates the difficulty of applying academic rigour to certain popular concepts.



## Introduction

Post-war Liverpool is a place that underwent substantial change. The perseverance of a sense of 'apartness' is crucial in both understanding the city and also the central questions of this thesis. Manifesting itself through arts, culture, personal identity and, it being Liverpool, football, a sense of Liverpool's existence as a place apart permeates through much of Liverpudlian life. In 2007, a group of Liverpool fans held up a banner in the Kop Stand at Anfield proclaiming "We're not English, we are Scouse".<sup>1</sup> A display at Lime Street around the same time declared "Liverpool: in England but not of it".<sup>2</sup> In an academic context, this somewhat vague idea of 'difference' manifested itself in the concept known as 'Liverpool Exceptionalism'.

Liverpool Exceptionalism, a concept defined almost exclusively by John Belchem, relies on two key pillars: the city's status as a port and, as a result, the influx of Irish people into the city. Belchem was by no means the first to identify these two characteristics but the general themes around which they are based have formed the roots of much of the writing on Liverpool in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and his description of the exceptional parameters that apparently define Liverpool have persisted throughout modern discourse of the city. As so much of the academic history of Liverpool has coalesced around defining it in exceptional terms, the issue of Liverpool's supposed exceptionalism is a pertinent one.

Belchem's two main works on the topic, *Merseypride: Essays in Liverpool Exceptionalism* and *Irish, Catholic, and Scouse: The History of the Liverpool-Irish*, establish a framework on which any attempt to define Liverpool's exceptionalism tend to depend. In these, Belchem effectively argues that the two main factors mentioned created a sense of 'apartness' within Liverpool. There are a wide range of identifiers that have contributed to any perceived sense of 'apartness' or exceptionalism in Liverpool and, in Belchem's thesis, many of those factors have their roots in the two above. In the argument that Liverpool's port created a sense of closeness with America as opposed to England, Belchem leans heavily on the idea that Liverpool was seen as the "New York of Europe" – a designation he expands upon by suggesting that "Liverpool

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.theanfieldwrap.com/uploads/2013/10/b\\_20100225093224\\_scouse\\_scouse\\_pride.jpg](http://www.theanfieldwrap.com/uploads/2013/10/b_20100225093224_scouse_scouse_pride.jpg)  
[Accessed 24-6-2019].

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.hilaryburrage.name/hilary\\_burrage/2008/06/liverpool-in-england-but-not-of-it.html](http://www.hilaryburrage.name/hilary_burrage/2008/06/liverpool-in-england-but-not-of-it.html)  
[Accessed 10-10-16].

stood proudly above the ‘Coketown’ monoculture of adjacent Lancastrian textile and industrial towns”.<sup>3</sup> In examining whether the Irish influx into the city created physical separation between English and Irish, Belchem promotes the idea that “in this distant and ever-irretrievable past before global trade declined, the empire disintegrated and the old slums were destroyed, the Liverpool-Irish ‘slummy’ was inscribed as the prototypical Scouser”.<sup>4</sup> On whether the port made Liverpool more cosmopolitan than other English cities: “once the great commercial and human entrepot linking the Old World and the New, Liverpool was a global port city with an ethnically diverse ‘cosmopolitan’ population”.<sup>5</sup> On whether Liverpool’s perceived lower class status helped further the city’s status as a place apart: “immune from the enterprise culture, [the descendants of the Liverpool-Irish] have sunk further into economic depression and (ungrateful) welfare dependency, remaining working-class when all around have moved onwards and upwards. An anachronism elsewhere in Thatcherite Britain, the term ‘working-class’ retained a residual pejorative relevance”.<sup>6</sup> Belchem’s work has been crucial in creating this framework for the city to be understood. This ‘apartness’, though incredibly difficult to precisely explain, exists as much in the collective identities of people from Liverpool as it has (to a degree) outside of it.

Ramsay Muir’s *A History of Liverpool* set the course for much of Liverpoolian historiography, by elevating the port as the Liverpoolian characteristic *super omnia* - per Muir, “the chief causes of [Liverpool’s] ultimate victory were no doubt beyond her control – the discovery of America, the transference of the main English trade-routes from the North Sea to the Atlantic [and] the rapid development of the cotton industry by the great inventions of the eighteenth century”.<sup>7</sup> The wealth of writing done on the city (both pre- and post-Belchem) has tended to prioritise Belchem’s above two factors in one way or another. Tony Lane’s *City of the Sea* did exactly this. Lane’s work, the first edition of which was entitled *Gateway to Empire*, makes no secret of attempting to explain how, in his view, “Liverpool is the only city in Britain (apart from London) upon

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<sup>3</sup> J. Belchem, *Merseypride: Essays in Liverpool Exceptionalism*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), p. xxvii.

<sup>4</sup> J. Belchem, *Irish, Catholic, and Scouse: The History of the Liverpool-Irish, 1800-1939*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2007), p. 322.

<sup>5</sup> J. Belchem and D. M. MacRaid, ‘Cosmopolitan Liverpool’ in J. Belchem (ed.) *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character, and History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), p. 311. This was followed by a recognition that the contemporary city is not quite so cosmopolitan, however.

<sup>6</sup> Belchem, *Merseypride*, p. 56.

<sup>7</sup> R. Muir, *A History of Liverpool*, (London: Liverpool University Press, 1907), p. 4.



which Britons have definite opinions and it is seen as a city of problems where the people themselves are reckoned to be a part of the problem".<sup>8</sup> By attempting to explain the city of the 1980s through the port(s), Lane identified a number of the themes that would be built upon by Belchem later, particularly the manner in which the port influenced other perceived Liverpoolian behaviours, such as casual labour. However, in the realms of identity formation and maintenance the degree to which one can say that these theses apply to the more modern city is slightly more questionable. Within the context of the post-war city, Belchem's 'Liverpool Exceptionalism' idea raises a number of problems.

Belchem's thesis, by its very definition, relies heavily upon evidence collated from before the Second World War. Whilst he has written persuasively on the city in other contexts and other time periods, his specific claim of exceptionalism is based necessarily within the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. If Liverpool's exceptionalism is rooted heavily within the experiences of immigrant Irish to the city then the degree of Irish influence in a city where Irish immigration fell substantially has to be questioned. Similarly, the razing of slums in the city, where substantial numbers of Irish resided, caused a degree of cultural and social mixing that made the 'Irish' less noticeable as a separate social grouping. While Belchem's claim that the 'Scotty Road slummy' acted as a foundational character in the Scouser seems to make chronological and thematic sense in its generality, the manner in which this can be effectively documented and accounted for, in the murky realms of identity formation, is questionable. Similarly, the fact that Liverpool as a port was so important to the early development of the city has to be questioned in the post-war period. The decline of the docks in Liverpool is no secret and the removal of a key marker of Liverpoolian identity – casual dock work as stevedores and more reliable work as merchant sailors – must have had an effect on the importance of the port within the wider Liverpoolian psyche.

Belchem's thesis also often relies on the image of Liverpool being negative. He suggests that the impoverished Liverpool-Irish was/is the foundational character of the Scouser. His descriptions of Dr Duncan's ventures into those slums and the conditions therein add to this sense of Liverpoolian misfortune. The city of the 1960s was a slightly different place, or at least depictions of it were. This is not to say that it was not

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<sup>8</sup> T. Lane, *Liverpool: Gateway of Empire*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1987) p. 13.

impoverished – it was in many places. This is not to say that depictions of the city were always positive – they regularly were not. However, it is to say that the city of the 1960s took up such a central position within the British cultural environment of that decade that it is very difficult to make the argument for Liverpool’s marginality creating a sense of ‘apartness’ from the rest of country as a whole. Liverpool, as a city, was a central character in the music press between the years of 1963 and late-1964. The number of think pieces, articles, and interviews that attempted to explain the ‘Merseybeat’ movement was substantial. Liverpool was not treated to various hagiographies, far from it. Rather, the image of the city was so markedly different to the pre-Second World War one that Belchem has described, and also the one of the 1970s onwards, that there is a gap in the historiography of the city, particularly when it comes to examining how ‘exceptional’ it is.

The Liverpool of the 1960s occupies a realm of cultural significance that is, on the whole, fairly well known. The Beatles are one of the most famous bands in the history of popular music. Their upbringings have been the subject of numerous documentaries, feature films, and countless quantities of writing. The city that they grew up in has often served as a foundational character in their development. This city, Liverpool, occupied a place within the cultural cache of 1960s Britain that has also been the subject of much investigation and attention. In some of the writing on Liverpool the temptation has been to include references to the city’s pre-Second World War maritime culture into post-war explanations. The importance of the city’s relationship with the United States of America, for example, has been held up as a key determinant in giving Liverpool’s music scene a ‘head start’ on the rest of the United Kingdom in playing rock ‘n’ roll. When this is put up against the recollections of the musicians at the time, the influence of American artists is of importance, but that of the port in allowing Liverpool this early access is an area of hotly contested memory. In later years, particularly the 1980s and early 1990s, attempts to ‘explain’ the city often took on a celtic hue, where John Sweeney’s analysis of the city in the aftermath of the Hillsborough football disaster suggested that Liverpool’s supposed sentimentality “comes from the Irish roots”.<sup>9</sup>

The aim of this thesis is, therefore, to examine Liverpool’s supposed exceptionalism within this post-war context. The aforementioned Merseybeat period

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<sup>9</sup> J. Sweeney, ‘City of Grief’, *The Observer*, (23 April 1989).

provides a certain corrective to some of the concepts that have underpinned Liverpool's supposed exceptionalism. By addressing three areas – firstly, the city's relationship with 'England' and its class status, secondly its depiction as a place that was uniquely susceptible to American influences, and finally its reputation as a place that was especially cosmopolitan (including the Irish aspects), this thesis will show that the Liverpool of the 1960s struggles, in places, to fit in to the exceptional construct that has been readily and keenly applied to the city of the post-war period. The aim is not to argue whether Liverpool is or is not exceptional. Rather, it is to test Belchem's thesis on the city in the period studied and see how it is or is not applicable.

There are two methods by which this research has been undertaken. The first is a newspaper review whereby the national music newspapers were examined for evidence of the above. The specific newspapers studied are listed both in the Methodology and Bibliography; the time period under concern was, as per the title of the thesis, 1960-65. The second branch of the research is an oral history consisting of thirteen interviews, undertaken specifically for this research, with musicians from the Merseybeat period in Liverpool. These musicians were of varying prominence within the scene, but all were from Liverpool, or very closely thereabouts. There are also a small number of other sources used – a limited use of national newspapers and a small number of television documentaries – but these are not the main sources used. The thesis is therefore structured around the three issues raised above and research evidence is synthesised through these three chapters as a means of providing comparative analysis between the two main sources.

## Part I: 1. Literature Review

The purpose of this Literature Review is to collate the various pieces of secondary material that form the base from which much of the original research stems. The aim is not to provide a comprehensive review of every conceivable facet of Liverpudlian history, but rather to give a framework to the three main chapters, with identity at the core of this process.

Identity, in its various incarnations and appearances, goes to the heart of this thesis. Establishing the existence (or not) of the identities that form a wider part of “Liverpudlianism”<sup>10</sup> is a considerable task. This chapter, therefore, seeks to provide context to the specific aspects of study (i.e. the identities that would/could have existed in 1960s Liverpool), rather than to opine on the forms that the various identities in Liverpool have become indelibly associated with the city in the intervening years to the present day – particularly “Scouse”, and whatever it means in a contemporary context. Starting with a brief overview of the general frameworks of identity, and the relevance of such a study through oral history methodology, the rest of the chapter pivots towards a discussion that matches up with the three main chapters.

### General frameworks of identity

Identity as a concept for use in the social sciences is usually defined along the lines of an individual’s attempt to understand their ‘self’ and accordingly to place their relationship with and against broader ‘identities’.

The issue of identity is an enormously difficult one. As a subject that has undergone evaluation and re-evaluation, bouncing from essentialist ideas to constructivist ones, a common criticism is that the term, “identity” has become too wide, too woolly and too imprecise for it to have any meaningful use in historical (and sociological or anthropological) analysis. As a consequence, the general consensus is that identity is ‘fluid’. Mark Christian’s contribution to an explanation of identity’s fluid nature is to describe it as “a jelly-like substance which moves somewhere else when one tries to press on it. Identity is never static, it is constantly on the move”.<sup>11</sup> Of course this might prove problematic in the future as attempting to define something that is

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<sup>10</sup> Although this terminology is in itself problematic, as this carries class and reputational connotations – see P. Boland, ‘Sonic Geography, place and race in the formation of local identity: Liverpool and Scousers’, *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, 92 (1) (2010), pp. 1-2.

<sup>11</sup> M. Christian, *Multiracial Identity: an international perspective*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000) p. 2.

constantly transforming is not the easiest task. Speaking in general terms, the frustration lies in 'identity' becoming a catch-all term, "used to uncritically support an untenably disparate range of claims".<sup>12</sup> Sight must not be lost, too, of the proposition that even if these identities manage to coalesce to form something that is identifiable, the end result is likely to be something that is 'imagined',<sup>13</sup> anyway. Anderson's central point is that the imagined communities to which he refers are always going to be imagined – "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion".<sup>14</sup>

Brubaker and Cooper's *Beyond Identity* gave an effective breakdown of the difficulty of using the term 'identity' to accurately describe the ways in which people come to understand their 'self' as explained above. They claim that modern attempts to avoid charges of 'essentialism' via suggestions that identities are fluid and multiple leaves historians "without a rationale for talking about 'identities' at all and ill-equipped to examine the hard dynamics and essentialist claims of contemporary identity politics".<sup>15</sup> This is perhaps a bit problematic for a discussion of a 'typical' Liverpoolian identity (although the extent to which any identity is 'typical' seems to do a great disservice to the natural differences between individuals) as there must be *something* to contrast it to. Stuart Hall's contention is persuasive in this regard. "identity is not a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute return. It is something. It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are...not an essence, but a positioning"<sup>16</sup>. Christian makes a similar contribution: "there is something real and tangible about identity in a social sense...identities may well be imagined, but they are still real in the manner that they are manifested in the modern world".<sup>17</sup> Whilst making clear that essentialist tropes are to be avoided, there must be something (whether real or imagined) that makes Liverpoolians identify as 'different'. John Royle suggests that (albeit with reference to 'England') "regional identity is a

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<sup>12</sup> P. Jones and M. Krzyzanowski, "Identity, Belonging and Migration: Beyond Constructing Others' in G. Delanty, R. Wodak, and P. Jones (eds), *Identity, Belonging and Migration* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008) p. 39.

<sup>13</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (London: Verso, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> R. Brubaker and F. Cooper, 'Beyond Identity', *Theory and Society*, 29 (1) (2000) p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> S. Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' in Williams, P and Chrisman, L., *Colonial Discourse and post-colonial theory: a reader*, (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), p. 226.

<sup>17</sup> Christian, pp. 2-4.

difficult and elusive identity, as much the product of external forces...as of internal factors such as language and culture”<sup>18</sup>. That local/regional identity is a difficult concept to adequately explain should go without saying, but nevertheless it is one that is vital to this piece of work. The reliance on myth, memory, and narrative are particularly important issues in this thesis, as will become apparent.

In addressing the nature of outside influence on questions of identity, Paasi suggests, “the notions that actors develop of themselves are continuously being confronted with images which other social actors (institutions, sympathetic/hostile groupings, public opinion and the media) produce of them.” Perhaps for Liverpoolians the generally negative reputation of the city in the recent past has/had affected their ‘identity’ in a manner not yet properly examined? Perhaps the greater influence on Liverpoolian identity is not some innate quality that all Liverpoolians have, but instead the reaction of its inhabitants to their perceived slighting at the hands of a supposedly hostile general populace. John Belchem touches on this idea extremely briefly in ascribing a certain ‘inverse pride’ to Liverpoolians.<sup>19</sup>

In a discussion of what adds up to a ‘Liverpoolian identity’, it seems necessary to properly examine the components of said identity. This need not be in an essentialist manner – breaking down the nature of ‘Liverpoolianism’ into certain essential parts and suggesting that these characteristics are imbued within all Liverpoolians would be a deeply unsatisfactory approach. Anssi Paasi’s analysis of the problems of looking for a ‘regional identity’ seems to be extremely relevant in this case, in particular the identification of two specific pitfalls in analysing regional identity. First, the implicit suggestion that regional identity is ultimately an empirically existing phenomenon in a given region that can be adequately analysed by using a specific body of research material. The second, that regional identity often implies the assumption of homology between a portion of space, a group of people and a ‘culture’ to form a homogeneous community covering a particular bounded territory.<sup>20</sup> The first problem hints at a tendency towards essentialism and the second towards generality. It is extremely unlikely that a definitive determination on regional identity can be discerned from a

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<sup>18</sup> E. Royle, ‘Introduction: regions and identities’, in E. Royle, (ed.) *Issues of Regional Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998) p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Belchem, *Merseypride*, p. 56.

<sup>20</sup> A. Paasi, ‘Region and Place: Regional Identity in Question’, *Progress in Human Geography* 27, 4 (2003) pp. 479-480.

limited sample base and this leads on to questions of method – what is an acceptable sample size to discern ‘identity’? For the purposes of this thesis, these questions are addressed in the methodology.

On the generality point, Brubaker and Cooper further articulate the problem in suggesting that assigning ‘identities’ to people leaves many “who have experienced the uneven trajectories of ancestry and the variety of innovations and adaptations that constitute culture caught between a hard identity that doesn’t quite fit and a soft rhetoric of hybridity, multiplicity and fluidity that offers neither understanding nor solace”.<sup>21</sup> The point, then, is to find a balance between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ identities; ‘hard’ being the idea that an ‘identity’ is something that everyone has, it is something to be discovered and implies high degrees of homogeneity among its members. By contrast a ‘soft’ identity, favoured in modern discussions of the idea, consists of a method that tries to avoid essentialism – identity is a social process. The aim, therefore, is to ascribe an identity approachable enough to avoid alienating many who might not identify with it while not being so vague as to make it completely meaningless. In addition, the idea that identities exist on their own must also be discarded: “identities are not hermetically sealed entities that are internally consistent, and which necessarily exclude other identities”.<sup>22</sup> It will of course be possible for a Liverpudlian to think of themselves as Liverpudlian *and* English or British or Irish and so on without holding back any of the other identities – they can exist simultaneously and with equal vigour. They can, per Cox, adapt to different social and political situations and circumstances.<sup>23</sup> This view of local identity emphasises the idea that they are “not singular or cohesive; they are multi-dimensional, layered, socially constructed, reconstructed and bought into various groups of people, sometimes for different reasons”.<sup>24</sup> Oral historical methods offer a method by which these layered identities can be better understood.

### Oral History and Identity

The wealth of writing on the relationship between oral history and identity, particularly as a means of encouraging interviewees to express their identity and the

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<sup>21</sup> Brubaker and Cooper, p. 30.

<sup>22</sup> Jones and Krzyzanowski p. 42.

<sup>23</sup> K. Cox, *Political Geography: Territory, State, and Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 147.

<sup>24</sup> P. Boland, ‘Sonic Geography, place and race in the formation of local identity: Liverpool and Scousers’, *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, 92 (1) (2010), p. 2.

associated benefits and problems, displays some of the methodological solutions to the above issues. The benefits of using oral history methods to analyse, and conceptualise, the concept of identity have been well set out. For example, Alessandro Portelli argues that “what is really important is that memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings...the specific utility of oral sources for the historian lies not so much in their ability to preserve the past as in the very changes wrought by memory. These changes reveal the narrators’ effort to make sense of the past and give a form to their lives”.<sup>25</sup> The lack of a ‘passive depository of facts’ makes the oral history interview a crucial space in which expressions of identity are both reflected on in hindsight (i.e. how the interviewee felt at the time under discussion), and the products of the intervening years – how the interviewee has allowed the period since that time to affect their narrative of it in the present. This is especially pertinent for Liverpool – a city that underwent a traumatic shift in its socio-economic status in the second half of the twentieth century. The 1970s and 1980s, for example, were a period of considerable change in the city, so the experiences of those years may have had the potential to cloud the earlier years under discussion for this thesis. Per Abrams, “decades of oral history practice have taught us that interrogation of an individual’s life history does much more than offer us empirical evidence about past events. The telling of a life story is a complex narrative performance which requires attention to the use of language, the deployment of narrative structure, the articulation of memory, the context within which the life is narrated; in other words, all the devices by which a person represents the self in oral fashion”.<sup>26</sup> The manner in which this was tackled in practice for this thesis will be covered in the methodology.

One of Paul Thompson’s key points about how oral sources differ from ‘ordinary’ sources is that the “the evidence of oral history is normally retrospective over a longer time span. There is the added possibility of distortions influenced by subsequent changes in values and norms, which may perhaps quite alter perceptions”.<sup>27</sup> This can, of course, be both a benefit and a drawback. Although the purpose of the oral history interview is rarely to gain a cast-iron narrative of factual events, there are a wide range of factors that can affect how the interviewee, in the present, portrays those events. Per

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<sup>25</sup> A. Portelli, ‘What Makes Oral History Different?’ in R. Perks and A. Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader*, (London: Routledge, 1998) p. 69.

<sup>26</sup> L. Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010) p. 34.

<sup>27</sup> P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1978) p. 98.



Abrams again, “where oral history really departs from other memory sources is in the recognition that memory is an active process. The interview is where a memory narrative is actively created in the moment, in response to a whole series of external references that are brought to bear in the interview”.<sup>28</sup> How to control for those external references is a key consideration for the care with which identity formulations described in oral history interviews must be treated, both on a personal level (the ‘external references’ created by the interviewer in the actual interview) and the wider, societal level (the impositions of decades of social change on the interviewee).

The identity in question, for this thesis, is one of Liverpool’s supposed ‘exceptionalism’. There are wider literatures on Liverpool’s exceptionalism, revolving around its relationship with the United States, its cosmopolitanism, and its peculiar relationship with Englishness and/or Britishness. These wider literatures on the above issues, by way of giving context to Liverpool’s identity, can be sometimes tangential or loosely linked to those under discussion in the chapters themselves. This context is necessary in order to understand the broader milieu in which Liverpool’s apparent exceptionalism resides, however. Certain other themes central to Liverpool’s exceptionalism appear throughout these wider contexts too, including the role of the port, which certainly applies to both the city’s purported cosmopolitanism and its relationship with the United States. These three themes are to be reviewed before examining the specific music-orientated and primary material in the substantive chapters themselves.

### *Debates surrounding Britishness and Englishness.*

The somewhat elusive concept of ‘apartness’ that is the focus of this thesis is a difficult one to effectively pin down. In the first chapter, to which this section refers, the initial approach was to try and define the threads of Liverpudlian popular (and academic) thought that place(d) the city in competing terms to ‘England’. There are numerous examples of this, most of which are covered in Chapter One itself.

The chapter, however, evolved once the research evidence started to provide different slants on the above framework. The chapter takes the shape of two main sections. The first is one that studies how Liverpool was portrayed and perceived as

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<sup>28</sup> Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, p. 23.

being apart from London. This incorporates both an investigation into the specific Liverpool vs London paradigm, as well as considerations as to whether this was simply another form of the North-South divide. The second section looks at the Merseybeat phenomenon at the time through the prisms of class and gender, particularly how the city was depicted as a place of deprivation and violence, and how the respective interviewees rationalised their experiences around this as a consequence.

The history of the North-South divide itself is long and complex. Helen Jewell's work on the source of northern consciousness in England suggests that, unlike so many commentaries, the North-South divide existed considerably before the Industrial Revolution. Jewell further makes the point that while the "current perspective is one of a poor north and a rich south, it replaces one which contrasted the rural south with the industrial north"<sup>29</sup> and that as late as the late-1980s, the government was apparently keen to remind audiences in the North West that prosperity was mainly to be found in the North. The North-South divide becomes a live issue on economic matters and this accords with the economic history of Britain in the last two hundred years. Jewell argues that a period of around one hundred years, from roughly 1780 to 1870, saw the North as being 'richer' than the South but that periods of economic decline exacerbated the inevitable realignment back towards the South.<sup>30</sup> The North-South divide can be displayed in this manner in modern Britain, too. Particular contemporary examples of a clear divide between North and South can include transport where, although the precise figures on regional allocations are not clear, spending in London amounted to £944 per head, compared to £291 per head in the North East, or £335 per head in Yorkshire and the Humber.<sup>31</sup> The long history of the North-South divide is a continuing issue. Finally, Jewell points out that the matter of the North-South divide became most apparent at times of considerable economic upheaval – just as George Orwell's *Road to Wigan Pier* (first published 1937) and J.B. Priestley's *English Journey* (1934) came to describe the state of dilapidated northern conurbations following the declines of the 1920s and 1930s, so did a wealth of academic and press writings in the 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> H. Jewell, *The North-South Divide: Origins of Northern Consciousness in England*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994) pp. 2-3.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> House of Commons Library Briefing Paper No. 8130, 12 February 2018.

<https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-8130> Accessed 17-07-2018

<sup>32</sup> E.g. D. Smith *North and South: Britain's Economic, Social and Political Divide* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), Jewell's own work can be referenced here too (1994). The North-South Divide became a

These moments of academic (or other) investigation, therefore, tend to arrive at moments of division – where differences between the North and the South became most stark and most quantifiable, usually through economic or social parameters. The idea of an economic North-South divide within the period being studied is not a prominent one for the reasons already explained but, as the chapter will show, this did not preclude articulation of frustration similar to the North-South divide both in the press and in the oral history interviews.<sup>33</sup>

With the economic considerations, therefore, come the cultural ones. Dave Russell's *Looking North: Northern England and the national imagination* is extremely helpful in addressing the myriad issues surrounding both a clear definition of a Northern identity, and the concomitant effect on the North-South divide. Directly writing about music, and wider cultural issues, Russell points to the early twentieth century as the period where southern (or, more accurately, London) dominance came to the fore. He suggests, "over the twentieth century, London maintained its dominant position and, indeed, enhanced it from the 1920s as the establishment of the BBC, the largely south-eastern-based recording and film industries, and a plethora of new dance halls and cafes added to its advantages".<sup>34</sup> Russell, too, draws attention to a trend that was extremely common in the Merseybeat period – the inevitable migration of northern musical ventures to the south, and to London: "most professional and trade organisations, including those originating in the North, have eventually followed the wider trend within business and commerce and situated their headquarters in London. In Incorporated Society of Musicians (1882) and the Amalgamated Musicians Union (1893), both founded in Manchester, were just two of the bodies that went in search of the largest concentration of potential members. Even the National Operatic and Dramatic Society (1899), founded by northern enthusiasts to serve their burgeoning amateur operatic movement, rapidly moved to the capital".<sup>35</sup> Russell also points out that the vast majority of art composers of note were mainly from London: "an analysis

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particularly notable issue around the General Election of 1987. A piece for *The Times* entitled *North-South divide is deep-seated and growing* (20 May 1987) examining a report for the Institute of Economic Affairs is typical of much of the coverage. R. Shields' *Places on the Margin* (London: Routledge, 1991)'s fifth chapter is devoted to the North-South divide, too.

<sup>33</sup> For economic explanations of the disparity between North and South, see also D. Read, *The English Provinces 1760-1960* (London: Arnold, 1964).

<sup>34</sup> D. Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the National Imagination*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004) p. 209.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p. 211.

of 62 English composers active between 1890 and 1960 and deemed worthy of inclusion in a standard dictionary of musical biography shows that London, with approximately 12 per cent of the population of England and Wales, produced some 40 per cent of them while the North, with 33 per cent of the population, provided only 20 per cent".<sup>36</sup> Dave Haslam's book on music in Manchester makes similar points, when writing about the city of the 1990s, "although being in Manchester gives you more credibility, the location of all the major record labels, music publishers, magazines and media in London creates something of a glass ceiling: 'in the end you're going to be shagged if you're not in London', says Mark Rae".<sup>37</sup>

The figures of the musical North-South divide notwithstanding, Russell's most pertinent point is about how London came to be used as shorthand for explaining this North-South divide. Although pointing out that there were times of regional prominence,<sup>38</sup> London always remained the epicentre. The southward shift of the national culture, which Russell directly suggests was the consequence of the foundation of the BBC, made it difficult for northern musical enterprises to attain the success that southern ones did. He suggests that resentment towards London was capable of sprouting from any aspect of musical production, noting for example that northern brass bandmen were critical of the BBC's coverage of banding. More extraordinary, still, were complaints made in the *Huddersfield Examiner* of a lack of attention paid towards the Tudor composers William Byrd and Thomas Weelkes, claiming that, "coinciding with the tercentenary of those two composers there comes a marked revival of interest in the works of Tudor composers. But perhaps one should say as marked revival of interest in London and the South, for in Huddersfield it did not need a tercentenary to draw attention to the madrigals of Byrd and Weelkes...whilst the South has neglected the Tudor composers, the smaller choirs of the West Riding have not".<sup>39</sup> Further criticism of the BBC's role in creating a homogeneous north is provided by Stuart Rawnsley, who describes "the unity of the BBC northern region, which stretched from the border with Scotland down through Cheshire and across to the Wash...with London claiming ascendancy over the North; a third of the area of England was reduced to the

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p. 212.

<sup>37</sup> D. Haslam, *Manchester, England: the story of the pop cult city*, (London: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 268.

<sup>38</sup> Russell, p. 222 – he refers to the Merseybeat period of the mid-1960s, the 'Madchester' of 1989-90 and the 'northern soul' craze for which Wigan Pier was notorious in the mid-late 1970s.

<sup>39</sup> In Russell, *Looking North*. p. 224.

broadcasting of ‘northern’ local culture”.<sup>40</sup> Russell goes on to claim that “the emergence of the Merseysound generated the first major North-South (or, more accurately, Liverpool-London) pop music conflict”<sup>41</sup> – details of which are to be fully examined in Chapter One.

Finally, the limitations of the North-South divide must be addressed. As a starting point, it is a helpful framework. However, as already shown with the prioritisation of ‘London’ over ‘the South’, the applicability of such a wide-ranging paradigm to a series of identity formulations as complicated as the heterogeneous ‘North of England’ raises issues. There is no homogeneous ‘North’. The most convincing argument that can be made in favour is that it exists solely as a bulwark against ‘the South’, which is in itself a problematic concept to define. Geographic definitions of the North aside, Russell is again most accurate when describing the North as “a divide that still exists in many people’s heads...” before claiming that “this is perhaps one reason why northerners are so inexact in their definition of the ‘South’, seeing it in the abstract as a source of misdirected power, rather than as an objective geographical entity”.<sup>42</sup> The divisions within the North, too, preclude it from being an acceptable way of defining such a large and diverse area and population. The particularities of any one location usually lead to further senses of difference as these particularities are dwelt upon.

Away from the North-South divide therefore, although probably a corollary of it, is the question concerning whether or not this divide can be explained through financial, economic, or class grounds. The manner in which North and South were defined in economic terms – rich vs poor, e.g. – is well covered.<sup>43</sup> However, Liverpool’s *particular* reputation for poverty, unemployment, and casualism arguably mark it apart within the wider discourse of North vs South. The above section, on the North-South divide (and London), are not enough, as Chapter One will show, to effectively explain Liverpool’s place within this paradigm.

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<sup>40</sup> S. Rawnsley, ‘Constructing ‘The North’: space and a sense of place’ in Neville Kirk (ed.) *Northern Identities: Historical Interpretations of the ‘North’ and ‘Northernness’* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2000), p. 14-15.

<sup>41</sup> Russell, *Looking North*, p. 225.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>43</sup> See D.H. Blackaby and D.N. Manning, ‘The North-South Divide: Questions of Existence and Stability’, *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 100, No. 401, June 1990, and A.E. Green, ‘The North-South Divide in Great Britain: an examination of the evidence’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 1998.

As a place of particular poverty, Liverpool was set apart – even from the rest of the North. In the economic upheaval of the 1980s, Russell suggests, “Liverpool suffered more than most. Although always associated in the popular imagination with a ‘rough’ working-class culture, the 1960s had overlain far more positive images. Now, a highly-publicised mixture of economic decay and industrial militancy saw the city defined as ‘Britain’s Beirut’”.<sup>44</sup> Where much focus has fallen on the 1970s and 1980s in the city, Russell is somewhat accurate in describing the 1960s overlaying more positive images of the city. Where the 1960s have been described as an “Indian summer...with unemployment a negligible 5%”,<sup>45</sup> by the same token, “by 1954...88,000 dwellings were deemed unfit. Liverpool’s working class grew on a diet of casualised work based around the docks that was poorly paid and notoriously volatile”.<sup>46</sup> Whilst Liverpool’s image in the public imagination was certainly more affected by the mid-late twentieth century, the 1960s in the city were by no means booming.

The 1980s were a period that cemented the city’s image within the public imagination, however. The aforementioned events of Heysel, Hillsborough, the Toxteth riots, the Militant Tendency and the murder of James Bulger, although different in character, were usually used as templates for ‘explaining’ the city, notwithstanding its record on unemployment. Earlier depictions of the city are no more generous. John Belchem’s identification of the Irish ‘slummy’ of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries being the foundation character of the ‘Scouser’ are an example of how said character developed through the twentieth century.<sup>47</sup> Popular depictions of the city, too, played up to this reputation for aimless welfarism. This arguably peaked with Alan Bleasdale’s bleak depiction of working life in 1980s Liverpool in *Boys from the Blackstuff*<sup>48</sup> – wherein the main character’s descent into borderline insanity due to his unemployment came to be the touchstone for any discourse on Liverpool. Hughes’ catchphrase, “gizza job”, cemented this depiction within the public imagination of Liverpool as a place of worklessness and desperation in the 1980s, culminating in Harry

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>45</sup> D. Frost and P. North, *Militant Liverpool: A City on the Edge*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2017), p. 9.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*. p. 7.

<sup>47</sup> J. Belchem, *Merseypride*, p. 56. See also the descriptions of the docks in Belchem, *Merseypride*, and the descriptions of the city’s uniquely poor health standards by Dr William Duncan in the C19th – Belchem, *Irish, Catholic, and Scouse*, pp. 55-63.

<sup>48</sup> *Boys from the Blackstuff*, (1982), BBC Television.

Enfield's similarly unemployed, tracksuit-clad '*Scousers*' becoming one of the most memorable, and quotable, characters in his sketch show of the early 1990s.<sup>49</sup>

This reputation for poverty must be taken together with how this affects the production of music. With specific regard to Liverpool, Helen Chappell, when writing about the 1980s in the city, interviewed a member of a group who claimed, "in such a run-down area people look around, see how depressing it is and decide they have to get out. It's the only way for young kids. Everyone you meet is in a rock band these days. There's more 'go' in people here."<sup>50</sup> Sara Cohen, writing on the same period, came to suggest that, "it might sound clichéd, but it cannot be denied that being in a band was seen by many, whether employed or unemployed, to be a 'way out' of their current situation, 'a way out of the jungle' as some phrased it".<sup>51</sup> The most intriguing aspect of Chappell's piece, however, is the contention by the very same young artist that, "he'd like to have been around in the sixties, when things were *really* lively. When all the docks were full of ships from America and Australia and the coffee bars were full of ravers. Those were the days".<sup>52</sup> The writing on Liverpool as a place of deprivation obviously had considerable stock in the 1980s – being as they were such a visible and notorious period in the city's history. Yet, the sixties were held up by this person as a golden age, both in terms of the local economy – the port – and the music being produced. Chapter One will assess how far the narratives of Liverpoolian poverty were applied to the 1960s city, both through the contemporary media and the retrospective oral history interviews.

The final sub-section of Chapter One addresses the issue of gender within the Merseybeat scene. Pat Ayers' contribution, consisting of considerations on how 'work' came to entrench many of the gendered inequalities that dominated the pre- and inter-war years. Ayers suggests that the casualism of the dock work, Liverpool's port being a crucial aspect of its identity, created and reinforced the workplace as being an exclusively male zone – as the port was crucial to the creation of a Liverpoolian sense of identity, then those excluded from that work were logically also excluded from that

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<sup>49</sup> *Harry Enfield's Television Programme* (n.b. renamed *Harry Enfield and Chums*), (1990-1999), BBC Television.

<sup>50</sup> H. Chappell, 'Mersey Dreams' in *New Society*, 6 October, 1983 p. 6.

<sup>51</sup> S. Cohen, *Rock Culture in Liverpool: Popular Music in the Making* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1991), p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Chappell, p. 6.

identity.<sup>53</sup> Tony Lane's work on Liverpool, too, provides an insight into how masculinity came to dominate the Liverpudlian environment, "real or imagined, embroidered or knitted plain, 'heroic' drinking exploits and sexual 'conquests' were a critical part of a sailor's credentials and gave him the reputation of being a 'real man'".<sup>54</sup>

These concepts, it is argued, spilt into the music scene, too. Ayers herself comments on this with regard to Liverpool in the 1960s, covered in Chapter One. Cohen, too, devotes a chapter on the 'Threat of Women' in her work on Liverpool's rock culture. Her contention was that "although women are, in general, noticeably absent from rock music, that absence was particularly noticeable in Liverpool"<sup>55</sup> the reasons for which she puts down to abuse from boys (namely being called "slags" for wanting to participate in music workshops), the hangover of the dock culture as explained above, and finally the manner in which "following on from the Beatles and other, music making [was emphasised] as a business and a career, which made the desire to make it a more exclusively male preserve that much stronger".<sup>56</sup> The role of women within rock music more generally has been a point of discussion in a number of other places – Helen Davies, for example, provided a useful press analysis of the 1990s in how the music press "abuses and trivialises female musicians". Such acts of investigation were not limited to this time period, however, where the popularity of American girl groups in the early 1960s (such as the Shirelles, the Chiffons, and the Shangri-Las) did not, according to Paul Friedlander, "change their financial or artistic status – women as a rule remained in their role of song interpreter and continued to be relatively low-paid performers".<sup>57</sup>

Women, therefore, were regularly not afforded the same status as men within the industry. Despite this, young women were regularly the target of it – both from the perspective of the labels and acts themselves, but also the press. This therefore led to a hierarchical stratum where young women were the main consumers of the pop rockers of the 1960s, as well as being the group most excluded from its production. This is, of course, not a characteristic unique to the Merseybeat period.

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<sup>53</sup> P. Ayers, 'Work, Culture, and Gender: The Making of Masculinities in Post-War Liverpool' in *Labour History Review*, Vol 69, No 2, August 2004 pp. 155-158.

<sup>54</sup> Lane, *Gateway of Empire*, p. 101.

<sup>55</sup> Cohen, *Rock Culture*, p. 204.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, p. 205.

<sup>57</sup> P. Friedlander, *Rock and Roll: A Social History*, (Oxford: Westview Press, 1996) p. 74.



### *Liverpool's Cosmopolitanism: Irishness and Afro-Caribbean Influences*

The second chapter focusses on Liverpool's supposed cosmopolitanism. A key structure of Belchem's exceptionalist framework, the idea that Liverpool is in some way cosmopolitan has been held up as one of the city's main pillars of identity. Liverpool is usually defined by its status as a port city with the consequent methods used to define the supposed difference that occurred falling on the significant Irish influx into the city (particularly during and after the Famine) and, to a lesser extent, the in-migration of people from other cultures and ethnic backgrounds. The second chapter addresses these two factors in turn, first analysing the actual impact of Irishness on the music, as rationalised both in popular memory and popular representation at the time. Second, the black experience in Liverpool is examined, both in terms of the influence on the music itself but, more importantly, how memories of black Liverpool intersected with a musical phenomenon that did take sizeable inspiration from African-American forms. This section, therefore, will provide some background to these issues, by looking at both the Liverpool-specific historiography and the wider material, situating both strands within a broader framework.

#### *Irish*

Insofar as the concept is regularly used to 'explain' Liverpool in various different ways, Irishness is crucial in most analyses of the city. For example, John Belchem's work is notable for the thoroughness in which it manages to pick apart the early 'Liverpool-Irish' identity formulations. The chronology is of crucial importance. This thesis, of course, focusses on the early 1960s, but much of the literature on Liverpool's supposed cosmopolitanism actually relies on much earlier time periods. This section will first look, briefly, at how the Irish have been accounted in that early Liverpoolian historiography, which forms a considerable amount of John Belchem's work on the issue. Second it will look at how this work has been used to form the bedrock of the 'Liverpool Exceptionalism' thesis, sometimes well beyond that period – and how Liverpool and Ireland have been linked through other media and in academia. Finally, how these formulations work with regard to music, particularly how second-generation Irish people fit within these broader paradigms.

The method through which Belchem sets out his thesis on the Liverpool-Irish, and the resulting effect on Liverpool's supposed exceptionalism in later periods, is done

via a forensic examination of the early Liverpool-Irish, coupled with a less forensic examination of those later periods.

Belchem's work, *Irish, Catholic, and Scouse* is an account of the Irish in the city between 1800 and 1939. His study of Irish enclaves in the city provides a persuasive account of how identities were constructed in the face of various social and economic pressures. He takes a long view of the Liverpool-Irish, rejecting the idea that the Irish Famine was the first instance of Irish migration to the city, whilst privileging the role that enclaves had in creating, and maintaining, an identity (that was heavily Irish and Catholic<sup>58</sup>) distinct to that of the residents of Liverpool prior to this influx. Included in this are a number of other factors that Belchem relies upon to relay an image of the city at this time. For example, his account of Dr William Duncan, the city's first Medical Officer of Health, emphasised the extent to which the Irish were unhealthy but also, importantly, the effect that they were having on their English neighbours, "by their example and intercourse with others they are rapidly lowering the standard-of-comfort among their English neighbours, communicating their own vicious and apathetic habits, and fast extinguishing all sense of moral dignity, independence and self-respect".<sup>59</sup>

Belchem also provides evidence of how these Liverpool-Irish worked. Indeed, Belchem describes elsewhere that those Irish stuck in the cycle of low-paid, low-progression, largely manual, work as being a *caput mortuum*, "a kind of under-class, as it were, unable, unwilling, or unsuited to take advantage of opportunities elsewhere in Britain or the new world"<sup>60</sup> – in other words, not only were they simply unemployed Liverpool-Irish, they were also kept apart from the wider British enterprise. Finally, also on work, it is also argued that casualism, a trait blamed for twentieth-century Liverpool's tendency for militancy and perceived collectivist trouble-making, came from the Irish workers on the docks. It was the "characteristic Liverpool-Irish work pattern, handed down from father to son, and readily adopted by new arrivals from across the water...men relished the independence of casual and maritime labour markets".<sup>61</sup>

These links between Liverpool and Ireland have been drawn, made, and sometimes imagined throughout the city's histories and heritage stories, but also its eulogies and denunciations. Belchem, of course, placed the Irish at the centre of his

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<sup>58</sup> Belchem and MacRaid, 'Cosmopolitan Liverpool' p. 326.

<sup>59</sup> Duncan in Belchem, *Irish, Catholic, and Scouse*, p. 58.

<sup>60</sup> Belchem, *Merseypride*, pp. 55-6.

<sup>61</sup> Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse*, p. 40.

version of Liverpudlian exceptionalism. He has drawn direct lines of causation between the experiences of the early 'Liverpool-Irish' and the reputation that the city has (or had) in the rest of the twentieth century and beyond. For him, "Liverpool's recalcitrance, its undue resistance to accept market realities, is given an ethno-cultural explanation which emphasises its class 'otherness'. Scouse militancy is not only irrational but also un-English, deriving its impetus from celtic truculence, from the city's Irish heritage".<sup>62</sup> The issue of what 'not accepting market realities' refers to is unclear at first – although this seems to refer to the period in the 1970s and 1980s in which the city was renowned for its industrial militancy and the eventual rise of the Militant tendency in the local Labour Party. Similarly, it is not totally clear whether Belchem is using this turn of phrase to represent his own views of the city, rather than what he perceives outside impositions on the city to be. This ambiguity does not last long, however, as he goes on to claim, "the Liverpool-Irish have always suffered the prejudice and negative reputation which now blight the city itself".<sup>63</sup>

Belchem makes this link again when discussing Irishness and the city of the late twentieth century: "an enduring cultural legacy of immobility, inadequacy and irresponsibility, this 'Irishness' has purportedly set Liverpool apart...when applied to Liverpool and its 'celtic' lumpenproletariat".<sup>64</sup> Whilst he does describe this as "ahistorical ethno-cultural stereotyping", he nevertheless explains that this formulation was adopted by Liverpudlians themselves, "in Liverpudlian popular history and working-class autobiography, the unadulterated image of the lowly Irish slummy, reckless and feckless, has been adopted as the foundation character, a symbolic figure of inverse snobbery and pride in the evolution of the true Scottie Road scouser".<sup>65</sup>

This, therefore, leaves Belchem's final comment on this, that "these images, myths, and stereotypes await historical deconstruction"<sup>66</sup> as the most pertinent. This thesis, of course, focusses on the 1960s in the city, a time where the vast majority of press coverage was positive, whereas Belchem's formulations in this regard necessitate

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<sup>62</sup> Belchem, *Merseypride* p. 55.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* p. 55.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* p. 56.

<sup>65</sup> Belchem, *Merseypride*, p.56. N.B. He does this with reference to Woods' *Growin Up: One Scouser's Social History* (London 1989) as well as Pat O'Mara's *Autobiography of a Liverpool Slummy* (Liverpool: Bluecoat, 2007), from which he claims that 'Irish' has been removed from the most recent reprint.

<sup>66</sup> Belchem, *Merseypride*, p. 57.

negativity – the prototypical scouser is a ‘slummy’, a ‘prole’, dependent on welfare and so on.

Beyond Belchem, both chronologically and thematically, Ireland has featured in a wide range of Liverpudlian culture, academia, and other ephemera. Two of the most notable memoirs of life as a working-class Liverpudlian, Frank Shaw’s *My Liverpool* and Pat O’Mara’s *The Autobiography of a Liverpool Slummy*, both hugely influential in providing a picture of the city in the early twentieth century, share the desire to privilege their respective Irish heritages in explaining why they, and the city, were the way they were. Shaw, for example, described his family as follows, “my family lived in Ireland. But my mother popped over from Tralee where me dad was making black puddings – an art unknown to the Irish, who still love to eat them – to make sure I was a Scouser, like my dad”.<sup>67</sup> The intersection of Irish and Scouse is made fundamentally clear. Pat O’Mara did the same, “my father’s father came from an old Tipperary family that dated far back into Irish history...he left Ireland, as most ambitious young Irishmen do, and came to England...an inherent rogue from his earliest boyhood, my father would never conform to the elegant life prescribed for him by his mother”.<sup>68</sup> O’Mara, too, frames his ancestry in strictly Irish terms – the transition from Ireland to England is defined as natural and understandable.

As exceptionalism is the focus of this thesis, the most convincing arguments therein with regard to Liverpool tend to lie on the Scouse accent and/or identity. Its essence need not be too weightily examined for this work, that being the aim of linguists rather than historians. Nevertheless, the accent is both simultaneously instantly recognisable for most in the United Kingdom, and its history relatively muddied – beyond a general understanding that the Irish influx must have played a role in some way. The breadth of literature on this is considerable. At one end of the scale is a work like Ron Freethy’s *Made Up Wi Liverpool: A Salute to the Scouse Dialect*, a popular book aimed at a casual audience, wherein the claim that “immigrants...poured into Liverpool, especially from Ireland in the 1840s when the potato harvest failed there and Scouse definitely owes its wonderful lilt to the Irish influence...in most of Lancashire, the word ‘door’ is pronounced *dewar*, whilst in Scouse this would be a sing-song like *dar* and reveals a

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<sup>67</sup> F. Shaw, *My Liverpool*, (London: Wolfe, 1971), p. 39.

<sup>68</sup> P. O’Mara, *The Autobiography of a Liverpool Slummy*, (Liverpool: Bluecoat, 2007), p. 10.

clear Irish link”.<sup>69</sup> At the other end of the scale lies Gerald Knowles’ study of ‘scouse’, which privileged the ‘Irish’ aspect in a manner that should be familiar. When discussing the (then) present state of Scouse for his PhD thesis published in the 1970s, Knowles suggested that, “Anglo-Irish became the non-prestige form, as opposed to the traditional North-Western English – presumably codified by other immigrants – which became the local standard. The two varieties have mixed in the course of the last hundred years, and in a rather interesting way. Prestige grammar, vocabulary and phonological structure have percolated downwards, and have imposed a surprising degree of uniformity on working-class speech”.<sup>70</sup>

Although critical of the evidence provided to support Knowles’ thesis that Scouse could be traced almost immediately post-Famine influx, Belchem accords a degree of agreement with how the Scouse accent happened. Belchem suggests that there were two key factors that accelerated this process; first, that “once established as the vernacular of the central areas, ‘slummy’ scouse flourished in a nodal position at the heart of the Merseyside communications network and the main labour market. While residential distance from the centre was increasingly possible and desirable, everyday working contact with scouse was unavoidable”.<sup>71</sup> Second, that the casual labour market created a lingua franca in which all, regardless of sectarian or religious affiliation, could participate.

Diane Frost argues that the city’s lack of domestic in-migration and unique casual labour system meant that the character of the city, “and, in particular, its dialect, was transformed into a mixture of Welsh and Irish.”<sup>72</sup> Frost drew on Fritz Spiegl’s *Lern Yerself Scouse*, too, wherein it was suggested that the famine Irish, “gave the Liverpudlian...not only his accent but also his Celtic belligerence”.<sup>73</sup> Frost is happy to define the Scouse identity as one that is “a white, working-class cultural expression of belonging”.<sup>74</sup> The extent to which “white working-class” is too broad a spectrum for such a formulation is crucial – there are plenty of white working-class identities that pervade an uncountable number of cultures worldwide – but there are few that are

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<sup>69</sup> R. Freethy, *Made Up Wi Liverpool! A Salute to the Scouse Dialect*, (Newbury 2007), p. 13.

<sup>70</sup> G. Knowles, ‘Scouse: The Urban Dialect of Liverpool’ (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Leeds, 1973), pp. 23-24.

<sup>71</sup> Belchem, *Merseypride*, pp. 45-46.

<sup>72</sup> D. Frost, ‘Black and White Scouse Identities’ in N. Kirk (ed.) *Northern Identities* p. 197.

<sup>73</sup> F. Spiegl, *Lern Yerself Scouse* (1984) – quoted in Belchem, *Merseypride*.

<sup>74</sup> Frost in Kirk, *Northern Identities*, p. 196.

framed within the concept of 'Irishness'. 'Irishness', for example, does not feature heavily in Robert Colls and Bill Lancaster's (edited) collection of essays on *Geordies*, and yet the concept of a Geordie being fundamentally white and working-class is straightforwardly accepted and explained. Drawing on Joseph Cowen, the Newcastle MP and industrialist, Colls claims that Cowen, "and his working-class allies refused to accept dominant versions of Englishness where working-class people were strangers in their own country while other people ran the place".<sup>75</sup> The class formulation abides alongside a resentment, like Liverpool, towards the South East and yet there is no mention of Irishness. It would be difficult, of course, to expect that this would be the case, given the location of Newcastle in the North East of England and obvious lack of proximity to Ireland. The danger, therefore, is that Scouse becomes subsumed within a very broad concept of being a "white working-class identity" without consideration of whether that whiteness, and that working class-ness, is framed within Irish structures. Indeed, Belchem argues that the Liverpool-Irish in the period he studied, "settled for a 'low' whiteness, below British working-class norms, which shaded very readily into an intuitive and compensatory 'greenness'".<sup>76</sup>

Philip Boland documented the numerous ways in which 'Scouse' as an identity was exclusive in a number of ways that went beyond whether or not someone could be considered 'Irish' or have Irish heritage. He found that people tended to privilege other factors in considering the 'Scouseness' of any particular individual. The most notable included the manner in which those who lived outside Liverpool (for example, in the Wirral) were often described by those who lived within the city as 'woollybacks' but, importantly, those outside the city were unable to make such distinctions and the 'Scouse' label was applied to all. Rather than there being one Scouse identity, he claims that, "there are different types of identity that exist in Liverpool. As such there is no single universal definition of a Scouser, rather there are competing interpretations that vary between people and places within Liverpool, across Merseyside, and the Liverpool City-Region".<sup>77</sup> The above should all be kept in mind when referring to how 'Irish' an identity 'Scouse' is. Leonard's point about 'Irishness' having to be *claimed* is hugely significant – for something that is identifiably and unquestionably of Irish heritage, such

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<sup>75</sup> R. Colls and B. Lancaster (eds) *Geordies*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1992) p. xiv.

<sup>76</sup> J. Belchem, 'Whiteness and the Liverpool-Irish', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 44 (1), (January 2005), p. 151.

<sup>77</sup> Boland, p. 17.

as Irish dancing, there should be little doubt that this is 'Irish' in origin, heritage, and intent. For the woollier and less empirically definable aspects of 'Scouse' traits, such as to the oft-referred sense of humour, and potentially innate musicality, such empiricism is very hard to come by.

Finally, criticism of Liverpool at various points in time did sometimes take a celtic slant. Most notably, in the aftermath of the murder of James Bulger a piece by Jonathan Margolis in *The Sunday Times* served as a final comment on the preceding decades in the city, in which it received seemingly endless negative press due to the Heysel and Hillsborough football disasters, the emergence of the Militant Tendency on the City Council, the riots in Toxteth, and the aforementioned murder of James Bulger. In this, Margolis suggested that popular thought on Liverpool was conducted as follows: "yes, this is a self-pitying and incipiently barbaric culture, but the people really are tremendously friendly and humorous. Perhaps it's the Irish in them, but they are emotional, wear their hearts on their sleeves and you have to respect the, err, current depth of their emotions".<sup>78</sup> The period being studied for this thesis is somewhat more complicated.

Tying the Liverpool/Irish quandary together, therefore, is the fundamental issue of music. It is, of course, music that is the focus of this thesis and the degrees in which 'Irishness', in any form, is expressed through music have been extremely well-documented.<sup>79</sup> The normal criticisms of endeavours to define any particular type of music as 'Irish' have been made in these volumes, given the suggestion made by Fitzgerald and Flynn that there was, "an overarching tendency in many journalistic and in some academic accounts to present homogeneous, or worse, stereotypical representations of musical 'Irishness' throughout the island".<sup>80</sup> Frustrating though the homogenisation of diverse musical forms is, the focus for this thesis is not identity formulation within Ireland itself, but rather the similar processes that take place in diasporic spaces – in this case, obviously, Liverpool.

The crucial paradigm to be explored here, therefore, is not the production of music within Ireland and the consequential sense of Irishness therein, however defined,

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<sup>78</sup> J. Margolis, 'Self-Pity City', *The Sunday Times*, 28 February 1993.

<sup>79</sup> Including, but not limited to: M. Fitzgerald and J. O'Flynn (eds), *Music and Identity in Ireland and Beyond* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), L. Davis: *Music, Postcolonialism and Gender: The Construction of Irish National Identity* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), J. O'Flynn, *The Irishness of Irish Music* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), G. Smyth: *Music in Irish Cultural History* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009).

<sup>80</sup> Fitzgerald and Flynn, p.8.

that this production engendered, but rather the identification of Irishness outside of Ireland. The literature on the performance of Irish music in diasporic spaces has grown in relatively recent years. The extent to which music is used generally as an expression of identity should be beyond question.<sup>81</sup> Music is a key method through which people can express their longing towards home, or the upkeep of traditions embedded in their individual heritages. Expressions of Irishness through Irish music have been well-covered in a number of different places. For example, Nicholas Carolan's study of Francis O'Neill and Irish music in Chicago is insightful on how a culture can be maintained in a foreign city. Mairtin Mac an Ghail and Chris Haywood's study of first-generation male Irish migrants into Britain, particularly Birmingham, after the Second World War is helpful, too. In that, the maintenance of Irish traditions is clear and given clear Irish explanation, "much of their world was within all-male environments, with versions of masculinity shaped and lived out within male workplaces, community pubs and at Gaelic games. A specific diasporian gendered way of life was constructed based on a male-dominated hierarchical Catholic Church and an Irish nationalist politics. This was marked by the playing of the national anthem at public gatherings and the obligatory response in terms of a military-style stance, the high visibility of the Irish flag, the tricolour, at social events, the consumption of traditional Irish music, recalling the blood sacrifices of male Irish heroes, and celebration of Irish literary figures".<sup>82</sup> The maintenance of this culture for first-generation Irish migrants, whatever the location or time period, is of crucial importance. The image of post-1945 Birmingham described above sounds extremely familiar to the Liverpool of the nineteenth century described by Belchem. The 'Irishness' of these traditions cannot be doubted.

Similarly, for an actual Irishman like Francis O'Neill, the maintenance of this different culture was of paramount importance. He was born in Ireland, moved to Chicago, and thus his memories of home, of that Irish culture, were authentic and lived. There are a multitude of different issues when it comes to categorising second-generation Irish and beyond. Holli and Jones ensure to provide appropriate balance to the new social category of 'Irish-Americans' in their study of Chicago in the late

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<sup>81</sup> See, e.g. Connell, J and Gibson, C., *Sound Tracks: popular music, identity and place*, (London: Routledge 2003), Stokes, M., (ed.) *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: the musical construction of place* (Oxford: Berg 1994), Hudson, 'Regions and Place: Music, Identity and Place', *Progress in Human Geography*, 30 (5), (2006).

<sup>82</sup> M. Mac an Ghail and C. Haywood, 'Being Irish and Male in Britain', in T. Inglis (ed.) *Are the Irish Different?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014) p. 148-9.



nineteenth and early twentieth century, “in the eyes of most non-Irish Chicagoans, Irish Americans were a monolithic group. And yet, though they formed a relatively cohesive community, the Chicago Irish were by no means a homogeneous lot...despite a common Irish Catholic heritage, their geographical backgrounds were far from identical. The most obvious difference, of course, existed between those born in Ireland and those born in America. The former had grown up in a predominantly Catholic, rural, and old-world environment, the latter in one that was more Protestant, urban, and industrialised”.<sup>83</sup>

Sean Campbell has been particularly helpful in establishing the processes by which second-generation Irish expressed their Irishness. In a study of popular music groups of the late-1980s to -1990s, Campbell details how many of these groups expressly privileged their Irishness over any perceived Englishness or Britishness. Oasis, icons of the Britpop era, were entirely made up of second-generation Irishmen. Upon being pressed for an answer as to whether they would record a song for the England football team, Noel Gallagher is alleged to have responded “over my dead body, we’re Irish”.<sup>84</sup> Campbell’s detailed breakdown of the perceived Irishness of The Smiths, for example, is illuminating. In it, he positions the group, and its members, against the dominant discourses of the period in which they came to prominence. Like Oasis the Smiths, also made up of second-generation Irishmen, were also based in Manchester. By documenting the themes within much of the music written and recorded by Morrissey and Johnny Marr, Campbell effectively displays how their second-generation immigrant status created mixed feelings of identity and belonging, echoing the lack of homogeneity described by Holli and Jones. Morrissey in 1985 suggested that, “[it’s hard] to describe what it feels like to be growing up slightly at odds with your surroundings...as a boy I felt not entirely at ease with either my Irish parents or my English companions. I think this is something that a lot of children of immigrants feel”.<sup>85</sup> Morrissey, it is clear, was particularly outspoken on such matters and, rather than wear his Irishness on his chest, instead expressed himself through charged political statements like suggesting that the IRA had, with the Brighton bomb (an attempt to assassinate Margaret Thatcher) been

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<sup>83</sup> M. G. Holli and P. d’A. Jones, *Ethnic Chicago: A Multicultural Portrait*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995) p. 82.

<sup>84</sup> S. Campbell, ‘Second-Generation Irish Rock Musicians in England: Cultural Studies, Pop Journalism and Musical Routes’ (unpublished PhD Thesis, Liverpool John Moores University, 2002) p. 5.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid* p. 210.

“accurate in selecting their targets”. At the height of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, the meaning was clear. Finally, Campbell examined how the press would relegate these groups’ Irishness in favour of describing them as typically British, or English. Campbell refers to a piece written in the NME in January 1988 in which it was claimed that the Smiths were, along with Madness and The Fall the only groups in the 80s who, “sang for or of England, in irreducibly English accents, with a music that could only come from the urban heart of England”.<sup>86</sup> This, he claims, was one of many attempts to marginalise these musicians who had all “drawn attention to their Irishness during the mid-1990s. [John] Lydon had, for instance, published his autobiography, titled *No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs*, in 1994, and offered, in the text, a vivid reconstruction of second-generation Irish identity-formation processes...meanwhile Morrissey had made reference, at the beginning of 1995 to the ‘Irish defiance’ that he had inherited from his parents...Noel Gallagher subsequently authorised a biography of the group that explicitly situated them in a diasporic Irish context”.<sup>87</sup> The style described in the NME in 1988, therefore, would continue and become even stronger in those Britpop years.

The above, therefore, provides evidence of the different ways in which Irishness was presented, or not, through the music of its emigrants. Unlike Francis O’Neill, or Morrissey, however, many of the Liverpool acts had no such immediate familial connection. The general understandings of Irishness were there, but in most cases, the young Liverpudlians playing pop music in the 1950s and 1960s in Liverpool tended to be third, or fourth-generation. This, when combined with the eroding effect that popular music had on the preservation of traditional Irish musical forms, did not provide for any outspoken claims of “I’m Irish” as per Noel Gallagher. Rather it existed in a much more ephemeral manner, emerging only at times of introspection and retrospection.

The themes explored here provide a brief overview of how Liverpool has been framed in Irish terms. In matters of methodical history, such as Belchem’s account of the early Liverpool-Irish, through linguistics in trying to explain the Scouse accent, and eventually in the media as a means of ‘explaining’ why the city attracted tragedy in the 1980s and early 1990s, Irishness pervades. Similarly, the methods by which first- and second-generation Irish battled to uphold their Irishness in the face of a music press

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid* p. 144.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid* pp. 142-3.

attempting to fit the groups in front of them within their own pre-ordained narrative is instructive.

### *Afro-Caribbean Experience*

There are two strands that need to be explained for the purposes of this thesis. The first is the Afro-Caribbean experience in Liverpool itself. The second is the rock 'n' roll phenomenon and its relationship with race.

On the first, Liverpool is a city that has had a complicated relationship with race. A key port in the Triangular Slave Trade, the city, it has often been accused, was a beneficiary of the wealth accrued on the basis of using Africans and Caribbeans as human capital. The modern city has come to face these challenges directly. The establishment of the International Slavery Museum is representative of the degree to which the city leadership has come to accept this aspect of Liverpoolian history. Although cut from the same cloth of Liverpoolian considerations of race, the link between the slave city and the city that came to be described as being imbued with racism of the “uniquely horrific” kind, is not clear cut. Ray Costello, for example, suggested that by the late eighteenth century, Liverpool was “the home of a free black community drawn from many sources including servants, students of noble descent sent for education along with the sons and daughters of African merchants and slavers, and the ‘dual heritage’ children of white plantation owners and African slave women. Numbers grew with the influx of discharged black soldiers”.<sup>88</sup> Not, therefore, a community that solely consisted of former slaves. Indeed, Liverpool was not a pre-eminent forum for the sale of slaves, even if they were key symbols of social status for local slavers.<sup>89</sup>

The impact of the slave trade on the Liverpoolian psyche, however, was considerable. Haggerty, Webster, and White articulate much of the internal wrangling over the city's imperial heritage by pointing to both the ways in which prominent contributors to Liverpoolian promoted a narrative that privileged Liverpool's global maritime heritage, rather than its imperial one. Ramsey Muir, the Edwardian historian of Liverpool, is accused of focussing “principally upon the role of what he saw as the city's great reforming elite, personified in William Roscoe, the fervent opponent of

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<sup>88</sup> Belchem and MacRaidl, 'Cosmopolitan Liverpool' in Belchem (ed.) *Liverpool 800* p. 324.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid* 320-321.

slavery”.<sup>90</sup> Belchem remarks similarly, suggesting that this process (in which he also mentioned Roscoe) amounted to a “rebranding exercise” that restored the images of those “reviled at the time...such as the radical abolitionists blind poet Edward Rushton”.<sup>91</sup> The diversity described by Ray Costello, however, made it “difficult to generalise about the diasporic identities of Liverpool’s Afro-Caribbean population except to speculate that the sheer diversity of Liverpool’s black peoples must have initially militated against a common articulation. Nevertheless, over time that population as well as its mixed-race descendants increasingly developed a new identity in opposition to the racism it experienced in white Liverpool”.<sup>92</sup>

If the diversity of the city’s black population made it difficult for a common identity to take hold this, as Herson suggests, was not, it has been argued, the case for the Liverpool-Born Blacks of the twentieth century. Jacqueline Nassy Brown’s work, based on a period spent in the city in the late-1990s, suggests that “slavery’s spectre envelops Liverpool”.<sup>93</sup> In this, Brown recounts conversations she had with Liverpool Born Blacks and how they would recall first, where they first found out that the city had been a key part of the slave trade, and second, various local stories, some myths, of the Liverpoolian heritage of slavery. Quoting a respondent called Akeem, he invokes modern parts of the city as being representative and indicative of the city’s past, “you can see the whole place is built up on the money of the slave trade. Definitely. Liverpool’s like that in general. You should visit these type of places...Dale Street, Castle Street. That was the centre of it. You can just go into those places, and you just *feel* it”.<sup>94</sup> Evident both in fact and in memory, the legacy of the slave trade within Liverpool is clear.

Legacies of the slave trade within the city are obviously of importance. However, the more contemporary experience played a considerable role, too. A handful of reports into Liverpool’s racial issues were commissioned in the inter-war years one of which

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<sup>90</sup> S. Haggerty, A. Webster, and N. J. White (eds), *The Empire in One City? Liverpool's Inconvenient Imperial Past*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008) p. 5.

<sup>91</sup> Belchem, *Liverpool 800*, p. 16.

<sup>92</sup> J. Herson, ‘Stirring Spectacles of Cosmopolitan Animation: Liverpool as a diasporic city, 1825-1913’ in Haggerty, Webster, and White, *Empire*, p. 73.

<sup>93</sup> J. N. Brown, *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail: geographies of race in Black Liverpool* (Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press (2005), p. 164.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid* p. 165.

was unquestionably racist<sup>95</sup> and the other a detailed study that worked to both showcase the economic obstacles that black people faced and to expose some of the myths that the first report helped propagate.<sup>96</sup> The two Alien Orders of 1920 and 1925, directed at ‘addressing’ the prominence of the progeny of white British women and black Afro-Caribbean sailors, entrenched eugenic ideologies. Whilst this was perceived to be a country-wide phenomenon, its effects were particularly profound in Liverpool. Spatial discrimination helped to entrench these attitudes, too. Liverpool was allegedly ahead of the curve on spatial segregation in Britain, emerging as early as 1871,<sup>97</sup> but this would usually fall back on class or ethnic lines. Over time, black Liverpoolians would become confined to a particular area of the city, namely Liverpool 8. It is suggested that this became de facto policy and was followed by housing authorities on the understanding that this was a particular area where ethnic minority families resided. Diane Frost has undertaken a number of studies on how this operated in practice, with private landlords and the local council “discriminating against black families, making it almost impossible for them to buy or rent outside of the ‘Coloured Quarter’”.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, alongside a physical separation ran an ethnic and communitarian one. It is suggested, again by Frost, that a shared black identity became first, most strong at times of racial hostility and second, an inclusive and positive one that was used as a method to fight said oppression.<sup>99</sup> These experiences formed the roots for what Jacqueline Brown would call the ‘Liverpool born black’ concept wherein those whom belonged to said ethnic identity existed apart from the commonly understood ‘Scouse’ frameworks.<sup>100</sup>

The black experience in Liverpool would continue to be a subject of consideration for decades to come. A wide range of groups dedicated to bringing attention to, or demanding change in, Liverpool’s race relations emerged in the years post-war and beyond.<sup>101</sup> Racial issues in Liverpool came to a head in 1981 with the

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<sup>95</sup> M.E. Fletcher’s *An Investigation into the Colour Problem in Liverpool and other Ports* (1930) was criticised for questioning the intelligence of mixed-race children and suggesting that conflict between black and white on ships coming to Liverpool could be solved by replacing black seamen with white.

<sup>96</sup> C. Jones, *The Economic Status of Coloured Families in the Port of Liverpool*, (1940).

<sup>97</sup> Belchem, *Merseypride*, p. 129.

<sup>98</sup> Frost, ‘Black and White ‘Scouse’ Identities’ in Kirk, p. 204.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 204-205.

<sup>100</sup> Brown, *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail*, pp. 92-98, 249.

<sup>101</sup> E.g. *The Liverpool Black Caucus*, the *Merseyside Anti-Racist Alliance*, the *Merseyside Community Relations Council*, the *Liverpool Black Organisation*.

event having entered public discourse as the ‘Toxteth Riot’ taking place. Although the consequence of further black demoralisation, a report by Lord Gifford QC, *Loosen the Shackles*, focussed on the causes of the riot itself, and was excoriating of almost every facet of Liverpudlian public life. The main takeaway from it has come to abide in almost every discussion of Liverpool and race, wherein the city’s racism was described as “uniquely horrific”.<sup>102</sup> Focussing on the role of the police, the local council, education, and employment opportunities in the city, Gifford’s report gave six reasons for its description of the city’s racism being ‘uniquely horrific’ which were, in order, the denial of access to jobs, the high unemployment level among black Liverpudlians, the use of racial abuse that would not have been acceptable elsewhere in the country, the failures of the Council, the abuse black people were exposed to if they left certain areas, and “because all this is happening in spite of the much longer settlement and greater integration of the Liverpool Black community”.<sup>103</sup> The city’s history, of *Before the Windrush* immigration, is therefore given as a reason for its uniqueness, or exceptionalism in this regard. Taking place as this report did, in the 1980s, care must be taken to not apply those precise conclusions to the city of the 1950s and 1960s. The investigations done on that period are discussed further in Chapter Two.

Racial tension was obviously not limited to Liverpool at this time. Investigations on ethnic minority communities of the immediate post-war years in Britain have inevitably (and with good reason) rested heavily on the Windrush generation. Although great pains have been made to explain the unique nature of Liverpool’s Afro-Caribbean population,<sup>104</sup> the actual discrimination of the 1950s and 1960s was not wholly different in character to that found elsewhere. For example, two surveys conducted in the 1950s showed that in Birmingham, only 15 out of 1000 landlords were willing to let their accommodation to Afro-Caribbeans,<sup>105</sup> and in London, 85% of landladies would not let properties to men who were “very dark Africans or West Indians”.<sup>106</sup> The Notting Hill Riots of 1958 have been held up as a prime example of the extent of racial tension

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<sup>102</sup> A. Gifford, Brown, W and Bunday, R, *Loosen the Shackles: First Report of the Liverpool 8 Inquiry into Race Relations in Liverpool*, (Liverpool: Karia Press, 1989) p. 23.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, p. 83.

<sup>104</sup> J. Belchem, *Before the Windrush: race relations in twentieth-century Liverpool* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014). The Museum of Liverpool describes the city’s black community as being the oldest in Europe: <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/mol/visit/documents/Liverpool-Black-community-trail.pdf>

<sup>105</sup> R. Weight, *Patriots: National Identity in Britain: 1940-2000*, (London: Macmillan, 2002) p. 140.

<sup>106</sup> J. White, *London in the Twentieth Century: a city and its people* (London: Vintage, 2008) p. 146.

and discrimination within Britain at this time<sup>107</sup> – with gangs of white men shouting “let’s lynch the niggers! Let’s burn their homes”.<sup>108</sup> These being just two examples of racial discrimination, on this Liverpool was clearly not exceptional and the broader context of clashes between Afro-Caribbean and white British can be understood.

This is the abridged background against which the Merseybeat movement came to fruition, however. It is not one, therefore, of widespread acceptance of immigration and ethnic minorities. Yet this was very rarely brought up in any of the press coverage. That coverage tends to present Liverpool as a cosmopolitan, outgoing city whose cosmopolitanism led to a higher propensity to be influenced by the musical forms of black Americans, rather than as a ‘problem city’, as it was depicted in the later twentieth century.

Tied closely within these Liverpoolian racial paradigms is the relationship that rock ‘n’ roll has with race. It is not a novel observation to link the popular music of the 1960s with the early rock ‘n’ rollers of the 1950s such as Chuck Berry and Little Richard. Friedlander, for example, charted the two stages of American rock ‘n’ roll as follows: “this music unfolded in two generations. The first, predominantly black, consisted of Fats Domino, Chuck Berry, Little Richard, and Bill Haley...their music, a synthesis of black and white styles and dominated by a strong, drum-dominated backbeat, sported lyrics celebrating this postwar generation’s teenage life experiences of romance, dance, a hint of sex, and rock and roll itself. Classic rock’s second generation garnered even more commercial success than the first, erupting with Elvis Presley in early 1956. This group was all white, had grown up listening to the pioneering country music of Hank Williams and, later, blues, rhythm and blues, and classic rock’s first generation. Presley’s chart success was followed in 1957 by the Everly Brothers, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Buddy Holly”.<sup>109</sup> The journey, therefore, that this music undertook had clear racial undertones.

From the beginning, therefore, the popular music of the mid-50s to mid-1960s was defined by the appropriation of black musical forms (although, as with most popular music, the lines are difficult to draw, and inspiration is in itself drawn from many sources) by white artists. Jack Hamilton effectively described the three main ways

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<sup>107</sup> See, e.g. R. Miles, ‘The riots of 1958: Notes on the ideological construction of ‘race relations’ as a political issue in Britain’ in *Immigrants and Minorities*, 1984 (3) pp 252-275.

<sup>108</sup> Weight, *Patriots*, pp. 294-5.

<sup>109</sup> Friedlander, *Rock and Roll*, p. 11.

in which rock 'n' roll became an increasingly white phenomenon. First, a “broadly transhistorical phenomenon of white-on-black cultural theft. In this telling, the appropriation of black musical styles by performers ranging from Elvis Presley to John Lennon is held as conceptually and ethnically contiguous with a singular tradition of plunder most fundamentally exemplified in the practice of blackface minstrelsy”.<sup>110</sup> This approach, Hamilton suggests, does not survive basic scrutiny as it entrenches ideas of “cultural ownership, essentialist originalism, and racial hermeticism”. Quoting Karl Hagstrom Miller, “the differences within African-American or white music cultures were more extreme than the differences between black and white music cultures”.<sup>111</sup> The second method that Hamilton describes is the placing of the onus on black performers to self-segregate, being done in conjunction with the civil rights movement in the 1960s. Hamilton dismisses this due to the inconsistent manner in which the supposed activism of black artists took place, citing James Brown’s 1968 hit *Say it Loud – I’m Black and I’m Proud* spending six weeks atop the R&B charts alongside his performance at the inauguration of Richard Nixon.<sup>112</sup> Finally, the method that Hamilton identifies as the most common, is that it is not discussed at all. Hamilton suggests that two main methods were used instead: a “Great Man” theory that privileged those such as Bob Dylan or the Beatles in which, quoting Fred Moten, “white avant-gardism whose seriousness require[d] either an active forgetting of black performances or a relegation of them to mere source material”. The second, a “nostalgic populism that glorifies rock and roll music for its democratising ‘folk’ elements. In these formulations rock music is often folded into a quasi-mythic lineage of American proletarian expression, with class trumping race in narratives that claim rock and roll music as an inherently and nobly working-class form”.<sup>113</sup>

The politicisation and racialisation of black music was not restricted to America. The rock and roll of the late-1950s was, in a notorious *Daily Mail* article described said music as follows, “it is deplorable. It is tribal. And it is from America. It follows ragtime, blues, dixie, jazz, hot-cha-cha and the boogie-woogie, which surely originated in the

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<sup>110</sup> J. Hamilton, *Just Around Midnight: Rock and Roll and the Racial Imagination*, (London: Harvard University Press, 2016), p. 9.

<sup>111</sup> K. Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow*, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 15.

<sup>112</sup> Hamilton, *Just Around Midnight*, p. 11.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid* p. 13.



jungle. We sometimes wonder whether this is the Negro's revenge".<sup>114</sup> Rock and roll, and its effect on young Britons, therefore, was clearly framed in problematic terms.

Liverpool's position within this paradigm is of crucial importance to this context. Where there are examples of the appropriation point within certain commentaries of the Merseybeat period, they are relatively few and far between.<sup>115</sup> The depiction of black music as just described was markedly not referred to in such terms in the newspapers of the period studied. Nevertheless, discussions surrounding the effect of Americanisation on Britain, whether from African-American communities or not, are highly relevant to this research.

### *Debates over Britain, Liverpool, and Americanisation*

The aim of this section is to lay out the ways in which two different, but closely related, issues concerning the United States have been approached. The role of America within the Liverpoolian framework can be therefore split into two distinct yet related strands. The first, is the clear, evidenced, and quantifiable economic relationship that Liverpool had with the United States. Still important in the 1960s, this connection had roots in the early history of the British Empire, its American colonies, and the Atlantic world. Liverpool's position on the North West coast of England put it in an enviable position as a trading outpost, looking out over the Atlantic Ocean (via the Irish Sea). This was for the most part a matter of business and entrepreneurial competitive advantage.

Per Milne, "Liverpool's role was to serve as the gateway between the world of raw materials and that of manufacturing; in this case, between the Atlantic rim – West Africa, the West Indies and North America – producing cotton, foodstuffs, oils, and timber, and the manufacturing powerhouse that was north-west England. Cotton, initially from the West Indies, but increasingly from the United States, became Liverpool's signature commodity".<sup>116</sup> The dubious morality of some merchants' decisions to continue trading with the Confederate States of America<sup>117</sup> perhaps

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<sup>114</sup> *Daily Mail*, 5 September 1956 in F. Schwartz (ed), *How Britain Got the Blues: the Transmission and Reception of American Blues Style in the United Kingdom*, (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 61.

<sup>115</sup> These are examined in Chapter Two.

<sup>116</sup> G. Milne, 'Maritime Liverpool' in J. Belchem (ed), *Liverpool 800*, p. 259.

<sup>117</sup> Belchem, *Merseypride*, p. 13.

highlights the importance of business considerations and that consequently, for the abolitionary zeal of those such as William Roscoe, Liverpool's businessmen were more than comfortable with the city's historic role in the Triangular Slave Trade. That American Civil War, and the disappearance of American merchant ships from the Atlantic, turned out to be an event of enormous significance for the city. Milne<sup>118</sup> suggests that this allowed Liverpool Atlantic steam firms to operate in the gap where the American merchant fleet had once operated and become the premier thoroughfare for those wishing to emigrate from Europe to the United States: the westward expansion of the United States after the end of the Civil War drew colossal numbers. Between 1825 and 1913 it is estimated that over nine million people left for the USA from Liverpool – more than any other destination for Liverpool liners combined.<sup>119</sup> This relationship is not confined to this period, either. The passenger ships continued to carry passengers to North America through to the late 1960s. Although Cunard, for example, moved their express lines to Southampton, Liverpool was still a city where passenger ships sailed to North America, until as late as 1967. The end of this line was caused by the emerging viability, and affordability, of commercial transatlantic flight. The idea of Liverpool being a place of migrating *people*, therefore, would clearly have been understood by the musicians of the early 1960s in the city. The presence of the American airbase at Burtonwood was also evidence of how the movement of people did not necessarily travel in one direction.

This trading connection must be treated with caution, however. Liverpool was as susceptible to the changing tides of world trade as any other maritime city. As Bristol's share of British shipping tonnage was eaten away at by Liverpool, so Liverpool's would be by the shift towards the Far East and Europe. As also must be taken into consideration, the United States was one among many of the city's viable trading outposts. The *Second City of Empire* nomenclature existed for a reason. Beyond this, however, it should not be lost that the city was not an end in itself. It was, for those who wished to make the voyage to the United States, an interstitial space, a gatepost, on the way to the promised land, rather than *the* promised land.

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<sup>118</sup> Milne, p. 261.

<sup>119</sup> J. Herson 'Stirring Spectacles of cosmopolitan animation: Liverpool as a diasporic city 1825-1913' in Haggerty, Webster and White (eds) *Empire in One City*, pp. 56-7.

The second strand of the Liverpoolian-American axis can be found in how the city attempted to define itself. Liverpool retained its long-standing association with the United States of America for a substantial time beyond 1886 when the *Illustrated London News* called Liverpool the “New York of Europe, a world city rather than merely British provincial”.<sup>120</sup> This was an attempt to paint Liverpool as an outward-looking, cosmopolitan destination and in return transatlanticism cut to the heart of Liverpool’s metropolitan identity. With reference to Liverpool’s architecture (culminating in the Pier Head development), Milne suggests, “by the 1890s, to be American was to be modern, and Liverpool made much of its association...Liverpool’s business district was even more American, with the Liver Building as its most obvious feature, but also the development of ‘canyon’ street lined with huge, heavy office buildings, such as the new India Buildings and Martins Bank on Water Street, both built in the early 1930s”.<sup>121</sup> This came at the cost of practicality, however, and the waterfront suffered from a lack of clear, singular direction but nevertheless. “...the connection with America remained a powerful symbol, and also an important daily practical measure, of the city’s place in successive transatlantic trends and fashion”.<sup>122</sup> To be American, therefore, was to be modern and on trend. Popular histories, too, privilege this “connection”<sup>123</sup> whilst claiming that the city can, aside from London, boast of “more connections with America than any other English city”.<sup>124</sup> The ‘American connection’ is privileged in a wide range of Liverpool historiography, therefore. It is, of course, present in much of the work concerning the Merseybeat movement and the Beatles, but appears throughout other works. When focussing on that Merseybeat period, the presence of American military personnel at Burtonwood has been leant upon, as has the experience of the Cunard Yanks (to be explored in Chapter Three).

Liverpool was by no means alone in privileging American connections as part of a community identity. America plays a key role within the much wider British psyche and there is a colossal amount of writing on this concept, particularly in works that

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<sup>120</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 18 May 1886.

<sup>121</sup> Milne, pp. 278-279.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 278, 281.

<sup>123</sup> R. Jones, *Liverpool: The American Connection: the story of Liverpool’s links with America from Christopher Columbus to the Beatles*, (Merseyside: Ron Jones, 1986).

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

focus on trying to, in some way, ‘explain’ Englishness or any related concepts.<sup>125</sup> The Second World War was a turning point in the cultural crossover between the United States and the United Kingdom. The war saw the United States become the foremost global economic superpower at the expense of the dwindling British Empire and Commonwealth. As the economic power of the United States grew, its rapid technological developments came to be held up, not just in Britain, as exemplars of the new, modern world with the primacy of the individual and consumerism at its core. The immediate post-war austerity that gripped Britain allowed the United States to assume a level of aspirational significance within certain elements of the British psyche (particularly the young) wherein American products, both physical and cultural, played a key role: “some younger intellectuals equated the United States with modernity, democracy and influence, and adored all things American with a passion that approached fawning idolatry”.<sup>126</sup> Indeed, as austerity tightened, it seemed slightly strange that three new Broadway musicals (*Bless the Bride*, *Oklahoma!* and *Annie Get Your Gun*) opened in 1948 on the West End and were hugely successful. Yet there are a number of important issues to be discussed. For example, the different reactions to American influence from different economic classes, the importance of American influence over varying spheres, and the extent to which this influence happened at a distance, such as the relative sparseness of transatlantic travel in the 1950s and 1960s.

The most pertinent aspect of Americanisation here, however, is the injection of American methods and influence into the British palate. From the explosion in the number of self-service supermarkets, through the prominence of American-style fast-food restaurants, to the display, for the first time, of Jackson Pollock’s art in 1953: all lead to the same conclusion of the increasing influence of America on the everyday lives of average Britons. The most common way in which America came to influence the lives of those ordinary Britons was through the cinema and film. Cinema itself was extremely popular – annual cinema admissions reached a peak of 1,635 million in 1946 and by

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<sup>125</sup> R. Colls, *Identity of England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), A. Rosen: *The Transformation of British Life 1950-2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), M. J. Wiener *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), K. Fox: *Watching the English* (London: Hodder, 2005) all contain reflections on the impact of American ideals, economics, and culture on British life.

<sup>126</sup> D. Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: a history of Britain from Suez to the Beatles*, (London: Abacus, 2006), p. 135.

1952 it is claimed that the total numbers attending the cinema were greater than those attending the theatre, football, cricket and racing *combined*.<sup>127</sup> This, coupled with the dominance of Hollywood films on the British cinematic industry, can show just how influential (and perhaps somewhat idealised) the image of America was on the average Briton. Indeed, “at the time, most Britons’ image of the United States involved simplistic impressions gained from American television programmes and films, which by the 1950s took up fully 70 per cent of British cinema projection time”.<sup>128</sup> The lack of, or prohibitive costs associated with, transatlantic travel made American film a key component of the ways in which Britons imagined America. If people were unable to see America for themselves then they had to make do with seeing the America that was presented to them. Young Britons, both male and female, would adopt American styles, such were their popularity. Young women “imitated Dorothy Lamour, Hedy Lamarr, Rita Hayworth. Ginger Rogers was a favourite of most girls and she made a film about a girl with a sweater...all the girls afterwards started wearing sweaters, it was amazing”.<sup>129</sup> For young men the influence of America manifested itself in a number of subcultures. From the Teddy Boys through to the Rockers,<sup>130</sup> American styles, mannerisms, and attitudes shaped what it meant to be a young person in a way that could not have been imagined before the Second World War.

This had profound effects, particularly on the working class whose attitudes were especially receptive to American influences. Lyons suggests that Hollywood played a key role in creating an image of America that contrasted with Britain in every conceivable manner:

The natural and built environment in Britain seemed colorless and uninspiring compared to the exciting images of the United States they saw on Hollywood movies. Blue skies, sunshine, beaches and palm trees contrasted sharply with the gray skies, coldness, dampness and what often seemed like the endless rain of austere Britain.<sup>131</sup>

Indeed, Pells argues that “America’s postwar leadership in science, literature, painting or architecture, [was not as prominent] as officers at the State Department would have preferred. For Europeans in the 1940s and 1950s...American culture meant movies,

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<sup>127</sup> J. Lyons, *America in the British Imagination: 1945 to the present*, (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) p. 22.

<sup>128</sup> Rosen, p. 151.

<sup>129</sup> P. Addison, *Now The War Is Over: A Social History of Britain: 1945-51*, (London: BBC, 1985), p. 201

<sup>130</sup> A good discussion on this can be found in Lyons, pp. 24-27.

<sup>131</sup> Lyons, *America in the British Imagination*, p. 55.

jazz, rock and roll, newspapers, mass-circulation magazines, advertising, comic strips, and ultimately television. This was a culture created not for the patricians but for the common folk".<sup>132</sup> 'Austere Britain' was, for many members of the rock 'n' roll generation, a key pillar to rebel against. The promotion of America as the ultimate symbol of modernisation was key in this process. When contrasted with the conservatism of the main media entities in Britain at this time, such as the BBC and the newspapers, 'ordinary' Britons began to treat anything American as something modern and new.<sup>133</sup>

Care must always be taken to make sweeping statements that only serve to cast entire classes as homogeneous wholes, but it can be relatively safely suggested that working class admiration of American culture was, in general terms, stronger than that of the left or the traditionalist right. Indeed, it has been argued that too much focus on anti-Americanism in the 1950s was given precisely because of the fact that it alienated those groups more than others. On the one hand, it is suggested that the left were critical, as is the norm, of American foreign policy and the purported inequalities of American society.<sup>134</sup> On the other, that traditionalist conservatives felt marginalised by the perceived threat to British culture and national character that American ideals and culture provided. It is suggested that, "the British upper classes saw themselves as custodians of a superior culture while the colonies comprised deported criminals, political and religious misfits and the unwanted lower classes...British visitors along with elites from other Western European nations saw the United States as an inferior country overly obsessed with wealth at the expense of the arts".<sup>135</sup> Francis Williams warned in *The American Invasion* of "what too often moves across the world in the wake of American money and American know-how is what is most brash and superficial; a surface way of life".<sup>136</sup> Middle class, left-wing intellectuals "denounced the control of American industry by unscrupulous robber barons and monopolies, and the anti-union ferocity of American employers who in collusion with the local and national

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<sup>132</sup> R. Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans have loved, hated, and transformed American culture since World War II*, (New York: Basic Books 1997) p. 204.

<sup>133</sup> A good discussion on this is to be found in D. Bradley, *Understanding Rock 'n' Roll: Popular Music in Britain 1955-1964*, (Buckingham, Open University Press, 1992) pp. 84-89.

<sup>134</sup> Lyons, *America in the British Imagination*, p. 90.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid* p. 38.

<sup>136</sup> F. Williams, *The American Invasion*, (London: Blond 1962), p. 11.

government fought bloody battles with labor”.<sup>137</sup> In many ways the criticisms from left and right came out of similar roots – the power of the American dollar. The actions of the notorious communist-hunting House Un-American Activities Committee, led by the Senator for Wisconsin Joseph McCarthy, also contributed to a deep-seated resentment among members of the more radical left. Yet despite the attention that these two groups garnered in contemporary historiography,<sup>138</sup> it is the case that the vast majority of British people looked upon America favourably, and this is most true of the working classes.

Per Pells, “those most alienated from English upper-class culture and constrained by societal norms, the working classes, the younger people, women and the Celtic peoples, American popular culture and the American way of life proved most enticing. The majority of Britons admired American notions of individual freedom, social equality and social mobility that challenged Britain’s rigid class structure”.<sup>139</sup> This would change into the 1960s as Britain undertook wide-spread social changes as a partial consequence of the liberalising legislative agenda of the Labour government led by Harold Wilson which, combined with the expansion of television into people’s homes and therefore much greater exposure to America beyond the one depicted by Hollywood, encouraged a more informed view on American current events. The assassination of John F Kennedy went hand in hand with the struggles of the civil rights movement and wider images of urban decay within America to create an image that was far removed from the one depicted in the 1950s. That being said, the working-class attachment to America and American ideals seems fairly well established. For however much Britons became more informed by the events and technological advances of the 1960s, the children and teenagers of the 1950s who would spark a cultural revolution a decade on were brought up on images from America, ranging from fantastical depictions out of Hollywood to the Beat Generation of Kerouac, Ginsberg et al.

Classlessness was the key feature throughout this cultural model, particularly in film and literature. Adam Faith, a working-class Londoner, commented that his ambitions of becoming an actor would have limited him “at best [to] a dimwit corporal

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<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.* p. 42.

<sup>138</sup> See A. Fried (ed), *McCarthyism: the great American Red scare: a documentary history*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), T. Doherty, *Cold War, cool medium: television, McCarthyism, and American Culture*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) among many others.

<sup>139</sup> Pells, *Not Like Us*, p. 63.

playing opposite the scathing, witty, debonair middle-class officer and gentleman”.<sup>140</sup> Indeed, an inter-war editorial in *World Film News* in 1936 suggested that, “Hollywood has evolved a whole class of films which has no parallel in England – films which tell stories, plain or coloured, of ordinary working people”.<sup>141</sup> In this way, therefore, American film became the ideal through which much of the young working class came to imagine their own places in the world.

The most remarkable aspect of American cultural imposition on Britain, however, is the one most relevant for this study; the omniscient presence of popular music from American artists on the British charts. Before even having to discuss the impact of American music on the Liverpool scene, it had a considerable impact on the wider British one for the two-three decades following the Second World War. Far from American influence being an elusive concept in this regard, between November 1952 and December 1959, 58 of the 94 total number ones in the period were produced by American artists.<sup>142</sup> American music evolved in its influence on the British cultural psyche. The evolution from jazz, through country and western, trad, skiffle and rock ‘n’ roll was one that cut to heart of British music in the post-war period. The most notable of those American artists was, of course, Elvis Presley. The shock of a white man from Tennessee playing the music of black Americans came as much a surprise to the British as to the Americans themselves. A white American though Elvis Presley was, he was not the only *American* who featured on the UK charts. Bill Haley and His Comets, Buddy Holly, Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis, Chuck Berry et al were all regular features on the UK charts.

Those artists in the charts that were not American by-and-large aped American music and style. Those such as Lonnie Donegan, Cliff Richard, Marty Wilde and Tommy Steele were accused of being ersatz Americans and unlike what was to come in the 1960s it was suggested that little invention or creativity was at play here, just mimicry. Cohn’s comments provide a clear picture as he describes the 1950s British pop scene as, “...pure farce. Nobody could sing and nobody could write and, in any case, nobody gave a damn”.<sup>143</sup> He was similarly scornful on describing the difference between Tommy Steele, possibly the most high-profile British rock and roller at this time, and Elvis:

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<sup>140</sup> Lyons, *America in the British Imagination*, p. 57.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, p. 57.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, p. 18.

<sup>143</sup> N. Cohn, *Awopbopaloobop-Alopbamboom*, (London: Minerva 1996) p. 55.



“compare [Steele’s] saga with Elvis and you have the precise difference between the great American and great British entertainment epic. Elvis became God. Tommy Steele made it to the London Palladium”.<sup>144</sup> There was therefore this lingering sensation of inadequacy. If one of the most prominent American exports to Britain, Coca-Cola, was to be called ‘The Real Thing’, then the British 1950s rock and rollers in comparison were most certainly not.

Whilst the impact of America in this regard is unquestionable, it seems less of a cultural exchange but more of a cultural wholesale adoption. Gillett suggests that, “almost all of the British rock ‘n’ roll records through to 1962 were shoddy, partly because most of them had accompaniments from musicians who, accustomed to supporting crooners, had no feeling for the rhythms of rock ‘n’ roll, and partly because the singers themselves could find no style of their own to accommodate the rock ‘n’ roll idiom but sang instead in mock-American accents”.<sup>145</sup> On Marty Wilde and Billy Fury, Gillett had a similar criticism, “like virtually every other British pop singer of the time, [they] did their best to sound American without actually going beyond the forms laid out in the arrangements of Roy Orbison, the Everly Brothers...and the other current American hit machines”.<sup>146</sup> Problematic, too, were the implications that British rock ‘n’ roll of that era was substantially watered-down in order to combat the reputation that rock ‘n’ roll had for stimulating juvenile delinquency. Steele and Richard have therefore been accused of being “leading British artists involved in the castration of rock ‘n’ roll; part of the familiar twentieth-century pattern of mediating American popular culture”.<sup>147</sup>

The United States, therefore, was (and remains) a key cultural touchstone across the identity spectrum and it is into this wider context that Liverpool neatly slots. Though the city has its own unique history with America, it was not alone in being an urban centre with a high proportion of young working-classes who admired the United States in one way or another.

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<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.* p. 57.

<sup>145</sup> C. Gillett, *The Sound of the City: The Rise of Rock ‘n’ Roll*, (London: Souvenir 1996) p. 255.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>147</sup> A. Horn, *Juke Box Britain: Americanisation and Youth Culture 1945-60*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 82.

The literature on these three key factors incorporates a wide range of different perspectives and considerations. Though such perspectives are welcomed, it is necessary to explain how they were applied and examined in the course of this research. The methodological issues to now be addressed revolved mainly around the operation of the oral historical aspect of the project, particularly concerning the intersection of popular and academic concepts.

## 2. Methodology

The research for this thesis consists of two main strands. First, thirteen in-depth oral history interviews undertaken with twelve musicians and one music journalist, all of whom were active in the Merseybeat scene. The second strand is an in-depth investigation of music newspapers, and a limited number of national newspapers, between the years 1960 and 1965.

### Oral History

Oral history, as a historical method, underwent a considerable amount of introspection in the latter half of the twentieth century. The foundation of the British Oral History Society in 1971, led by Paul Thompson, proved to be a key watermark in the progression of oral history's methodological vigour. Thompson's *Voice of the Past*<sup>148</sup> would both become a key text outlining the practicalities of undertaking oral history projects, but also a rigorous defence of the discipline. In time, other practitioners would contribute vital works to the oral history repertoire. Alessandro Portelli's *The Battle of Valle Giulia* and *The Death of Luigi Trastulli* were both vital accounts of oral history in action, but his article *What Makes Oral History Different* (1979) remains a key text on the procedure and justification for oral history methods.<sup>149</sup> Other contributions, such as Studs Terkel's *Hard Times* and Luisa Passerini's *Fascism in Popular Times* have provided crucial examples of the revealing aspect of oral history's undertakings on class.<sup>150</sup> The benefits of oral history being used to better explore the experiences of the marginalised have been well laid out, notably in feminist analysis.<sup>151</sup> Finally, the manifestations and actual physical processes of undertaking oral histories have been laid out in increasing depth and helpfulness.<sup>152</sup> The application of some of the above issues to my own interviews will be considered in this section.

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<sup>148</sup> Thompson, *Voice of the Past*.

<sup>149</sup> See also R. J. Grele *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History*, (London: Precedent, 1991).

<sup>150</sup> S. Terkel *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (London: Lane, 1970), L. Passerini *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). See also, A. Thomson *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Oxford 1994).

<sup>151</sup> S. Berger Gluck and D. Patai (eds), *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, (London 1991), S. H. Armitage and S. Berger Gluck, 'Reflections on Women's Oral History: An Exchange' in *Frontiers: Journal of Women's Studies*, No 19 (3) (1998), and J. Sangster's numerous works on Canadian women.

<sup>152</sup> L. Abrams *Oral History Theory*.

The interviewees were mostly born in the 1940s and were all, with the exception of one, in their early-to-mid 70s. They all, again bar one, played in Merseybeat groups in the 1960s in Liverpool. The one who did not was a music journalist in the city. The most important qualifiers, therefore, were that the interviewees were from Liverpool (or very close thereabouts) and played in a group in the 1960s in the city.

The experience of being a musician in Liverpool in this period incorporated a number of different variables, from those who were prominent at the beginning of the Merseybeat phenomenon and have been referenced in various works as being a key driver of American influences into the city, such as Ted Taylor, to those who took more peripheral roles and whose notoriety was not as obvious, such as David Boyce. Although all of the interviewees were male, and thus contributions in the oral history evidence were lacking a female perspective, they were not all white – with two from BAME backgrounds. The lack of female perspective was not through lack of effort – rather the number of female groups and/or performers in the Merseybeat era was astonishingly small, making the acquisition of female perspectives incredibly difficult.<sup>153</sup>

Interviews mainly took place in the interviewees' homes, with some also undertaken in the School of History at the University of Liverpool, and one at BBC Radio Merseyside. All took place in and around the North West, with some in the centre of Liverpool itself and others in places such as Southport, Ormskirk, and Port Sunlight. All interviews took place one-to-one. The interview with Chris Huston was conducted via Skype, which caused the conversation to be somewhat less natural, owing to a slight delay. This was not a substantial obstacle, however, even if the experience was slightly different.

In these interviews, structure was maintained via a series of rough areas that I wanted to cover, but questions were open-ended and general. The avoidance of a 'question-and-answer'-type questionnaire was desired due to the problems that have been explained by oral historians. Abrams, for example, drawing on a series of responses to Paul Thompson's Edwardian project, suggested that the "interview tended to become a narrative constructed by the questioner or the questionnaire-writer".<sup>154</sup> There is a degree to which this is unavoidable – the interview does take place so that the

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<sup>153</sup> Attempts were made, for example, to contact Cilla Black for interview, but her death in August 2015 came before any progress had been achieved.

<sup>154</sup> Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, p. 108.

researcher gathers evidence for a particular piece of research, after all. However, by avoiding the 'questionnaire' style but maintaining a loose structure of topics considered for discussion, the narrator was encouraged to offer opinions in a conversational style without the rigidity that a strict 'question-and-answer' method may provoke.

During these interviews, the interviewees were asked about their childhoods, their experiences in groups, and their subsequent reflections on said experiences. As the playing in groups tended to incorporate what might be termed, 'work', this was a key consideration, too, as well as their social lives. This was all done with reference to the concept of Liverpool Exceptionalism, a term of which only one interviewee had heard, but all were aware of the general concept when explained. The disconnect between academic history and popular perceptions was, therefore, a conflict that had to be addressed for this research. This disconnect seems a particular issue for oral history projects where the reliance upon already existing academic frameworks could potentially limit the scope of any given project. For the purpose of this research, however, the potential alternative explanations for Liverpool Exceptionalism seemed to be covered within the three chapter titles in one way or another. All interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed by myself. All interviewees were made aware of the ethical considerations to which an oral history project must adhere, and all signed a consent form.

The method by which the interviewees were contacted was through individual contacts after research based on existing websites and other social forums. To start with I collated a list of groups that were either still in some way active, or contactable (or both), and started the process of contacting the groups one by one. Most often this was via email. It was a method that had mixed success. Many groups relied on managers who would screen emails or had email addresses that were either dormant, or very rarely checked, if at all. The 'snowballing' effect, however, proved to be extremely helpful and it was through which I secured a number of interviews. The 'snowballing' method is popular among oral historians as it can create "a picture of [the interviewees'] social networks, attitudes, myths, and memories, for which the very circularity of the enclosed group would be a strength rather than a weakness".<sup>155</sup> By comparing and contrasting some of the different testimonies from people who were in

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<sup>155</sup> Thompson, *Voices of the Past*, p. 103.

similar places at similar times, it was possible to recognise how certain events were prioritised, relegated, or shaped by the intervening passages of time.

'Snowball', or 'chain referral' sampling has come in for some criticism, however. Biernacki and Waldorf, for example, listed a number of issues. On starting the referral chain (or finding respondents), they suggest that the initial respondent found can disproportionately affect the subsequent referrals found in that chain. Further, they also suggest that once the initial chain has been exhausted, then starting another one can prove problematic.<sup>156</sup> On this, I was keen to have different chains so as to diversify the sample base – Frankie Connor led me to Ozzie Yue, for example, and Mal Jefferson led me to Brian Jones and Faron Ruffley. By the time I had exhausted my interviewees, I was content with the number I had managed to interview. Second, verifying the eligibility of respondents has been questioned.<sup>157</sup> Again, this was not an issue for this research as, unlike in the examples suggested by Biernacki and Waldorf (the interview of heroin addicts), the respondents, owing to their semi-public profile, were easy to verify – usually through a straightforward internet search. Finally, controlling the types of chain is also crucial particularly when the researcher must ask themselves, "how many more cases should be collected and in what direction should the referral chain be guided? The decision here should be based on at least two considerations: representiveness of the sample and repetition of the data".<sup>158</sup> For this research, efforts were made to draw from the entire Merseybeat period in order to diversify the interviewees within this already small group. With this being said, this particular criticism of snowballing is somewhat mediated by oral historical methods where, it has been argued, the fixation on the representiveness of the sample can be sidelined in favour of focussing on the value of each single respondent, as explained below.

Owing to the nature of the proposed interviewees in question – namely the likelihood of a large number of musicians active in the 1960s still being alive or living in the UK – the strategy of recruitment was not intended to produce a fully representative sample of 1960s Liverpool. Rather, the aim was to discover the multifaceted and varied lived experiences of various musicians in that period. Questions concerning sampling have been addressed by oral historians of note, such as Ronald Grele, who suggests that

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<sup>156</sup> P. Biernacki and D. Waldorf, 'Snowball Sampling: Problems and Techniques of Chain Referral Sampling', *Sociological Methods and Research*, 10 (2), November 1981, pp. 144-149.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 150-2.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*. p. 156.

those who question how representative or accurate any oral history research group is are addressing the incorrect question. Rather, it is, “a false issue and thereby obscure[s] a much deeper problem. Interviewees are selected, not because they present some abstract statistical norm, but because they typify historical processes”.<sup>159</sup> The statistical issues, therefore, take a backseat to those of historiography and how the historian’s own concept of history affects the evidence itself. Whilst it is of course crucial to ensure that the interviewees had relevant experience in order to partake in the process, two contributions guided my own approach on the sampling issue, one directly from Paul Thompson, and one vicariously from him. First, “a half dozen individuals with such knowledge constitute a far better ‘representative sample’ than a thousand individuals who may be involved in the action that is being formed but who are not knowledgeable about that formation”.<sup>160</sup> To this end, the hypothetical number of people whom I could have interviewed was already quite small – former professional musicians from the Merseybeat era in Liverpool. Concerns over sampling for different conditions, such as the overall representation of the population of Liverpool in the 1960s, for example, would have been an approach unsuited for this project. The second contribution comes directly from Thompson himself, namely that, “concern for representativeness is essential if oral history is to realise its potential...but it is equally important to not become obsessed with this issue, and lose sight of the substantive issues in developing methodology...one of the deepest lessons of oral history is the uniqueness, as well as the representativeness, of every life-story”.<sup>161</sup> Representativeness for this research, therefore, was secured by targeting Merseybeat musicians – whether they were exactly representative of a much broader group of, for example, Liverpudlians in the 1960s, was not an overriding concern owing to the value of oral historical evidence as laid out by Thompson.

The research privileged those with at least some sort of online presence, access to that online presence, or personal connections to those with it. In reality this is a fairly broad group of people and this research was able to speak to people who were both still maintaining a public presence pertaining to their music, and those who did not. The interviewees were, therefore, people whom I had to contact directly to gauge interest,

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<sup>159</sup> R. J. Grele, ‘Movement without aim: methodological and theoretical problems in oral history’, in *Oral History Reader*, p. 41.

<sup>160</sup> H. Blumer, in Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, p. 103.

<sup>161</sup> Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, pp. 103-4.

rather than volunteers in response to an advertisement. The potential criticism of this approach is that of the 'self-selective group' which would be very unlikely to be representative of the community as a whole. This approach, it is suggested, can lead to either the reinforcement of existing myths, or the replacement of "upper-class wisdom with a lower-class one".<sup>162</sup> Though not quite the angle taken for the purposes of this thesis, Thompson's other contributions on this issue provide additional guidance. The ultimate issue with the 'self-selected group' is, according to Thompson, the potential for "local history drawn from a more restricted social stratum [tending] to be more complacent, a re-enactment of community myth".<sup>163</sup> The additional sources used, and contrasting oral evidence, is indicative of how myths were effectively challenged throughout this research. The contrasting oral evidence for this research, for example, was indeed drawn from different social strata and this produced different testimonies, particularly from Ramon Deen, David Boyce, and Ozzie Yue. The issue of 'community myth' was similarly limited among the narrators from similar socio-economic backgrounds, too, however.

With this in mind, I was keen to ensure that the group had to be musicians from the period. To take each in turn – the age of the interviewees was very similar, with most in their early-to-mid-70s. Their genders were, owing to the nature of the scene itself, entirely male – although this was, in itself, helpful owing to various pieces on the Scouse identity and how it is seen as a male one. Finally, the Merseybeat period was one that was dominated by young white men, with a small number of exceptions. The racial question in Liverpool, however, is a charged one, so it was crucial to ensure that this was not allowed to be one that was solely examined through the lens of white respondents – there were, therefore, two interviewees of BAME background. This thesis therefore makes no attempt to provide a definitive case study of the minority experience in Liverpool at this time. I did, however, attempt to ensure a chronologically balanced collection of interviewees – there being a clear divide in the success of those groups that were early on the 'scene', such as The Undertakers or Kingsize Taylor and the Dominoes, and those who did not achieve similar success but were present later on, such as The Hideaways or The Roadrunners.

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<sup>162</sup> P. Thompson, 'Voice of the Past' in *The Oral History Reader*, p. 27.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid*, p. 27.



The oral history in this thesis was undertaken with a number of different theoretical guidelines in mind. First, Thompson's work on emphasising the benefits of oral history in combatting the manner in which "history was essentially political: a documentation of the struggle for power, in which the lives of ordinary people...were given little attention except in times of crisis" certainly apply. As a means of 'filling in the gaps' of traditional history, oral history obviously plays a key role. Again, per Thompson, "witnesses can now also be called from the under-classes, the unprivileged, and the defeated. It provides a more realistic and fair reconstruction of the past, a challenge to the established account". This is true of this research to an extent. Whilst class considerations were not a vital consideration when identifying those who would take part, the most pertinent aspect of Thompson's claim is of a challenge to the established narrative. Oral history is an opportunity for those without the benefit of prominent social and economic standing to leave behind some kind of record, unlike those that Portelli describes as the "ruling classes", who have traditionally been able to leave records behind. As a method of exploring the histories of the understudied, oral history is unparalleled. Studs Terkel's *Hard Times*, focussing on the stories of those affected by the Great Depression, remains a classic of the genre.

Oral history, however, need not just be a matter of giving representation to the voices that have been traditionally marginalised, but they also quite simply act as a window into the private sphere. Although an understandable focus on the benefits of access to the private sphere has been through the "transforming impact"<sup>164</sup> of oral history on family lives, this can also apply to other relationships, such as friendships. Family plays a role in this research but is not the sole focus of it by any means. The oral histories undertaken and collected for this research work to address a gap in the historiography of Liverpool after the Second World War. Though oral histories have taken place in the city<sup>165</sup> in relatively recent years, attempts to address the 'exceptional' aspect of Liverpoolian identity have not been forthcoming. The specific aspects of Liverpool's supposed exceptionalism have focussed on working-class historiography and experience, but not through oral history testimony. Belchem's *Irish, Catholic and*

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<sup>164</sup> Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, p. 8.

<sup>165</sup> Such as L. Balderstone, G. J. Milne, and R. Mulhearn, 'Memory and Place on the Liverpool waterfront in the mid-twentieth century' *Urban History*, 41 (2014); H. Wilson, *Childhood Memories of Post-war Merseyside* (unpublished PhD Thesis, Liverpool John Moores University 2016), R. Taylor and A. Ward, *Three Sides of the Mersey: An oral history of Everton, Liverpool, and Tranmere Rovers* (London: Robson, 1994).

*Scouse*, for example, leans heavily on working-class experience, but limits itself to pre-1945. Oral history is therefore an extremely valuable methodology in drawing out these experiences and discovering the emotion behind identities which are in and of themselves difficult to comprehensively define.

Second, the inter-subjectivity issue within oral history is also of crucial importance to this thesis. Per Abrams, “intersubjectivity in the context of oral history refers to the relationship between the interviewee and the interviewer, or the interpersonal dynamics of the interview situation and the process by which the participants cooperate to create a shared narrative...the interviewer by word, deed and gesture in the interview solicits a narrative from the narrator; a different interviewer would solicit different words, perhaps even a very different story or version of it”.<sup>166</sup> Intersubjectivity defines how the oral history interview is not a place for objectivity.<sup>167</sup> Per Portelli, “the control of the historical discourse remains firmly in the hands of the historian. It is the historian who selects the people who will be interviewed; who contributes to the shaping of testimony by asking the questions and reacting to the answers; and who gives the testimony its final published shape and context...the class speaks *to* the historian, *with* the historian, and inasmuch as the material is published, *through* the historian”.<sup>168</sup> The creation of the source by the historian themselves is therefore of crucial importance, in terms of the historian’s interpretation of the words spoken through actively responding to them as the interview takes place.<sup>169</sup>

There is a tension in an oral history interview, therefore, between representing the evidence provided by the interviewee as a documentation of their own personal recollections and the degree to which the evidence is ‘conversational’. Per Grele, “given the active participation of the historian-interviewer, even if that participation consists of a series of gestures or grunts, and given the logical form imposed by all verbal communication, the interview can only be described as a conversational narrative: conversational because of the relationship of interviewer and interviewee, and narrative because of the form of exposition – the telling of a tale”.<sup>170</sup> Interviews are therefore joint enterprises between interviewee and interviewer, though this is not to

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<sup>166</sup> Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, p. 56.

<sup>167</sup> Abrams suggests there is “no pretence at neutrality or objectivity”, *Ibid*, p. 56.

<sup>168</sup> A. Portelli, ‘What Makes Oral History Different?’ in *The Oral History Reader*, p. 72.

<sup>169</sup> See also: V. Yow ‘Do I Like Them Too Much? Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice Versa’ *Oral History Review* Vol 24 (1) (1997).

<sup>170</sup> Grele, ‘Movement without aim’, *Oral History Reader* p. 44.

say that they should consist of equal testimony. Per Thompson, “the whole point is to get the informant to speak. You should keep yourself in the background as much as possible...not thrusting in your own comments and stories”.<sup>171</sup>

The historian’s personal characteristics are consequentially vital, albeit in a manner that is difficult to effectively quantify and account for. As Joan Sangster suggests, “own culture, class position and political worldview shapes the oral histories we collect, for the interview is a historical document created by the agency of both the interviewer and interviewee”.<sup>172</sup> My own characteristics, for example, as a privately-educated white man from London could have affected the openness of my interviewees in different ways. I would question whether I would have had some of the responses I had with reference to how much ‘chasing girls’ was a motivation in playing in groups, sometimes with accompanying stories, if I were female, for example. On the other hand, I may have had more open interviewees if I were from Liverpool.

Finally, the oral history interview is not, and is never intended to be, a perfect narration of past events. The subjectivity of the interviewee has to be addressed – in other words, people naturally use their current lives to shape their past memories. The value of oral history would be considerably compromised if it merely consisted of a bland recollection of events as and when they occurred. Rather, it is the fact that the past, as it exists within the minds of the interviewees, is also a reflection of their contemporary situations. Per Portelli again, “oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did”.<sup>173</sup> The contemporary situations must be considered in two different ways – the personal circumstances of the interviewee, and the wider cultural environment in which that memory is being recalled. For example, the idea of what it means to be a ‘Scouser’ probably changed in the years between 1960 and 2019. One interviewee noted that he could no longer understand young people on the train due to the evolution of the Scouse accent, to give an example. It is inevitable, with the consideration that the interview will only ever take place in the present, that the evidence produced by the interviewees will consist, inevitably, of an enmeshment of the historical past and the present time in which the interview is being conducted. For the

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<sup>171</sup> Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, p. 178.

<sup>172</sup> J. Sangster, ‘Telling Our Stories – Feminism’ in *The Oral History Reader*, p. 92.

<sup>173</sup> Portelli, ‘What Makes Oral History Different’, *The Oral History Reader*, p. 69.

purposes of this research it was never going to be possible to control for the time period, the 1970s and 1980s, in which Liverpool underwent a series of social and economic changes that would have inevitably affected the perception of the city in the minds of the interviewees.

The personal and the wider cultural environment very easily cross over here – the extent to which the interviewees allow their own personal experiences of the city at the time to inform both how they recall events from their earlier lives, and how they make sense of them today. Defined as the “cultural circuit”,<sup>174</sup> the process of personal and public memory become inexorably intertwined. Per Summerfield, “the discourses of, especially, popular culture inform personal and locally told life stories, in that narrators draw on generalized, public versions of the lives that they are talking about to construct their own particular, personal accounts...in reproducing the self as a social identity, we necessarily draw upon public renderings”.<sup>175</sup> Rather than attempting to compartmentalise the personal and the public discourses into separate entities, therefore, their enmeshment and inseparability is a crucial element of the oral history process. Per Thompson, “people interpret their experiences within the culture they provide. Consequently, stories which are not literally true may be socially important because other people believe them”.<sup>176</sup> This particular issue was of enormous importance within this research – particularly with regard to memories of the Cunard Yanks within the Merseybeat story, an issue to be discussed.

Portelli summarises the main issue with regards to memory and oral history. It is, “not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings. Thus the specific utility of oral sources for the historian lies, not so much in their ability to preserve the past, as in the very changes wrought by memory. These changes reveal the narrators’ effort to make sense of the past and to give a form to their lives and set the interview and the narrative in their historical context...changes which have taken place in the narrators’ subjective consciousness or in their socio-economic standing may affect, if not the actual recounting of prior events, at least the valuation and the coloring of the story”.<sup>177</sup> The interviewee who had heard (and read about) Liverpool

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<sup>174</sup> Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, p. 59.

<sup>175</sup> P. Summerfield, ‘Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews’, *Cultural and Social History*, (2004), 1, p. 68.

<sup>176</sup> Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, p. 106.

<sup>177</sup> Portelli, ‘What Makes Oral History Different’, *The Oral History Reader*, p. 69.

Exceptionalism, for example, would have inevitably allowed his reading of that work in relatively recent times to 'colour' the story he presented in his testimony. Contained within that, too, is an inter-subjectivity issue as once the interviewee knew that I acknowledged his reading of John Belchem then he may have (intentionally or not) tailored his responses with that in mind. So long as this issue is recognised, then it need not be fatal to the evidence, so long as the questioning by the interviewer remains consistent. The relevance of this particular criticism is of paramount importance to this thesis. The wider context notwithstanding, personal experiences undoubtedly affected some of the oral testimony.

The aim of the oral history interview, therefore, is not to 'catch out' the interviewee, but rather to use any inconsistencies as strengths. Per Passerini, "the guiding principle should be that all autobiographical memory is true, it is up to the interpreter to discover in which, where [and] for which purpose".<sup>178</sup> The aim is not to discover some conclusive 'truth' – an issue particularly problematic when tussling with identity – but rather to use the cumulative evidence as being representative of a broader 'culture' or, indeed, 'identity' – as far as that can be done. The issues being examined for this thesis, from as wide ranging (and difficult to grasp) an issue as defining Irishness within the Liverpoolian identity, to establishing when certain records were released, vary in their importance for 'truth'. As Passerini suggests, the assumption should be that every memory is true, in as far as the interviewee believes it to be. The use of that evidence thereafter, however, is where oral history methodology becomes extremely valuable – for even memories that are demonstrably untrue (and can be proven thus) can be key indicators of wider societal shifts, changes, or even enduring myths.

To sum up, therefore, the final oral history work is, per Abrams, "the result of a three-way dialogue: the respondent with him or herself, between the interviewer and the respondent, and between the respondent and cultural discourses of the present and the past".<sup>179</sup> The evidence produced by this three-way dialogue contributes to an understanding of how people define themselves, and forge identities based off a wide range of different forces.

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<sup>178</sup> L. Passerini, 'Women's Personal Narratives: Myths, Experiences, and Emotions' in Personal Narratives Group, *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* (Indianapolis 1989), p. 197.

<sup>179</sup> Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, p. 59.

### *Newspaper Review*

Alongside the oral history interviews ran a comprehensive analysis of the contemporary press, focussing mainly on the local and national music press with limited aspects of the national press included, too. The music newspapers examined were *Mersey Beat*, the *New Musical Express*, the *New Record Mirror*, *DISC*, *Melody Maker*, *Beat Instrumental*, *Hit Parade*, *Fabulous*, and *Record Retailer*. *Mersey Beat* was the dedicated newspaper in Liverpool dedicated to the movement, whereas the remainder were national publications. *New Musical Express*, *New Record Mirror*, *Melody Maker*, *Hit Parade* and *DISC* were the most popular examples and nationally available, whereas *Beat International* was more of a specialist and niche beat music magazine. *Record Retailer* was a magazine aimed at retailers. Finally, *Fabulous*' audience was young female teenagers and it was specifically aimed at them, with the music being less important than in the dedicated music magazines. All of the national music newspapers were published, and had their editorial offices based, in London.

In addition to this, some aspects of the national press were examined, too, including *The Sunday Times*, the *Daily Express*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, the *Daily Mail* and *The Observer*. The primary focus for the newspaper review was undoubtedly the music newspapers so the above four titles were something of an ancillary source. With this in mind, all four could be considered, at the very least, right of centre politically so this was considered when using evidence from these sources. Certain, more provocative, descriptions of Liverpoolians were to be found in the national press which were totally lacking from the music press, for example. The audience, in this way, conveyed drastically different messages in many cases – the audiences of the music newspapers were almost certainly the consumers of the music (namely, teenagers) whereas the audiences of the national broadsheets and tabloids were adults and likely detached from the phenomenon.

The period examined, as above, was 1960-1965. The analysis was done in one of two ways. The national news press was the most straightforward, owing to digitisation of archives. This therefore consisted of entering terms that were likely to be relevant to the period being studied, such as 'Merseybeat', 'Liverpool Sound', 'Liverpool', 'The Beatles' and so forth. The vast majority of material, however, came from the music press. This is for understandable reasons, considering that it was their entire purpose to produce content that reacted to the Merseybeat phenomenon. The music press was not

digitised, and therefore required the physical searching of the archived copies of the newspapers in both the British Library and the Liverpool Library. This was done both with physical copies and microfilm. This process consisted of reading every copy of the aforementioned newspapers in the period 1960-1965 and noting passages, articles, editorials, and features of interest and relevance. The research evidence was mainly found in the mid-1962 to mid-1964 period with a considerable drop-off in 1965 and, considering the fact that Merseybeat did not emerge until 1962, extremely limited evidence between 1960 and 1962.

Press analysis as historical method has provoked a considerable amount of academic thought. Adrian Bingham's contention that "popular newspapers have not, in general, featured prominently in histories of modern Britain"<sup>180</sup> is qualified with the point that they have become an increasingly used source as access to them has become easier and more widespread. Criticism of press analysis as a method tended to come from a Marxist perspective,<sup>181</sup> wherein the unsurprising angle consisted of suggestions that newspapers were instruments used to deceive the working-classes of their own oppression. Bingham also argues that older work on newspapers suffered from a preoccupation with social and economic elites and that more popular newspapers, such as the *Daily Express* and *Daily Mail* were discarded as subjects of study because of the respective ownerships of Lord Beaverbrook and Lord Rothermere. This particular criticism is still extremely pertinent today and is applied with vigour to the publications of Rupert Murdoch.<sup>182</sup>

The benefits of newspaper analysis, however, rather than acting as a simple repository of facts, is to be used in a manner that, "[explore] that representations and narratives that circulated throughout society. Newspapers played a significant role in setting the agenda for public and private discussion, and in providing interpretative frameworks through which readers made sense of the world".<sup>183</sup> The degree to which this is a circular process is up for debate: in other words, how people shape their

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<sup>180</sup> A. Bingham, 'Reading Newspapers: Cultural Histories of the Popular Press in Modern Britain', *History Compass*, 10 (2) (2012) p. 1.

<sup>181</sup> T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, (London: Verso, 1979) for example.

<sup>182</sup> From official government inquiries such as that undertaken by Lord Justice Leveson, to 'alternative' news sites such as The Canary, preoccupation with newspapers' ownership and behaviour therein remains a contemporary concern.

<sup>183</sup> A. Bingham, 'The Monster? The British Popular Press and Nuclear Culture, 1945-early 1960s', *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 45.4 (2012) p. 142.

worldviews in reaction to newspaper editorial policy or whether newspapers shape their own editorial policy in reaction to the opinions of their readers. The particularities of this debate are not for here, but what is unquestionably crucial, regardless, is to situate a newspaper within its wider cultural milieu, “we cannot properly assess the political, social and cultural significance of newspapers simply by studying their content: we need to place them in their proper historical context and understand how they were produced and received”. This is crucial for understanding the music press, too. Though their ownerships may not have been questioned to the same degree as national newspapers such as the *Daily Mail*, the fact remains that they performed a role in appealing to a certain demographic and were tailored to that end. This point will be returned to later in this section.

Alan Mayne’s work on *Representing the Slum* provides two key features with regard to understanding a newspaper’s role in this process. First is the motivation of newspapers to, “give dramatic immediacy to a particular episode among multiple urban exchanges by translating it into a powerful spectacle capable of engaging a mass audience”. The need for the newspapers to represent the Merseybeat phenomenon as something that could ‘engage a mass audience’ clearly falls within the purview of how the newspapers under consideration for this thesis should be treated. The second strand of Mayne’s work focusses on ‘trigger words’ being used, in combination with extreme repetition, to create an image that enables audience comprehension. In this, he uses depictions of Sydney slums to show how newspapers can create these images. For example, when explaining how time is framed within these slums, he shows how contrasts were made between the busy cities and how, “by contrast, time in the slum is disregarded; life is directionless, lethargic and listless. Repeated performances of these time disjunctures aim to show bourgeois purpose being imposed upon slumland by the explorers...slumland is a place of *slumber, sleep and stupor*”.<sup>184</sup> These specific trigger words were not necessarily used in the same manner in the music press with regard to Liverpool, but overarching themes certainly were. The manner in which the press is used to create these images is of paramount importance to this thesis.

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<sup>184</sup> A. Mayne, ‘Representing the Slum’, *Urban History*, 17 (1990), p. 72.



Press analysis within the music industry, too, provokes important questions of provenance and method. Press analyses in music histories are far from new.<sup>185</sup> Important within this process have been analyses and explanations of the aforementioned historical and cultural context in which they existed. Roy Shuker, for example, suggests that the early newspapers, such as *Record Mirror* and *DISC*, only operated in the 1950s to “reinforce the star aspect of pop consumption, feeding fans’ desire for consumable images and information about their preferred performers, as did pop and rock magazines aimed at the teenage market”<sup>186</sup> whilst acknowledging that the 1960s was where this began to change. Nevertheless, Simon Frith has identified the blurred lines between genuine rock journalism and rock publicity, pointing out that, “record company press departments recruit from the music papers, music papers employ ex-publicists; it is not unusual for writers to do both jobs simultaneously”.<sup>187</sup> These relationships provide a problem, therefore, in how to utilise the music newspapers as sources. Similar to the oral history evidence, however, the aim is not to collate ‘facts’, but to study representations: representations of the city of Liverpool, of its population, and so forth.

The provenance of the music newspaper sources must, therefore, be kept in mind. The owner and editor of *Mersey Beat*, for example, Bill Harry, was well-known to be extremely close to the acts themselves. Brian Epstein had a regular column in the *New Musical Express*. The representations contained within the newspapers, therefore, are not to be treated with reverence, but as a source that can explain how these representations were undertaken and created to provide a comprehensible milieu for the “mass audience” to absorb. Far from being a ‘repository of facts’, the music newspapers had to respond to their readers, actual and potential. Shuker finally suggests that, “there is now a greater emphasis paid to the role of music press and music critics, placing an emphasis on the manner in which their musical discourse constructs notions of authenticity, musical merit, and historical value”,<sup>188</sup> allowing an

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<sup>185</sup> These range from foundational musicological texts such as S. Frith, *Sound Effects: youth, leisure, and the politics of rock* (London: Constable, 1983), through S. Jones, *Pop Music and the Press* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), to H. Davies, ‘All rock and roll is homosocial: the representation of women in the British rock music press’, *Popular Music*, Volume 20 (3) (2002).

<sup>186</sup> R. Shuker, *Understanding Popular Music Culture*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 148.

<sup>187</sup> Frith, *Sound Effects*, p. 173.

<sup>188</sup> Shuker, *Popular Music Culture*, p. 159.

insight into the process by which popular music narratives were created, rather than trying to establish a 'truth' through them.

The methods by which this research was collated have provided a unique insight into the ways in which Liverpudlians have defined themselves and been defined. The methods, drawing heavily on oral historical practice and newspaper analysis, only become valued for the purposes of this research when applied to the three main pillars as hitherto described. The first such pillar is the odd relationship between Liverpool and concepts of 'Englishness' and/or 'Britishness'.

**Part II: Chapter One: Britishness, Englishness and the problems of  
categorisation in defining collective Liverpoolian identity in the  
Merseybeat period.**

The material discussed in the literature review on the much wider questions of Britishness and Englishness, amongst others, is of consequence here. Not with regard to whether the fundamental question can be answered (if indeed, it ever can) on what Englishness and/or Britishness actually mean, but rather the different ways in which Belchem's underpinning argument can be applied to Liverpool at this point in time in the 1960s. If the city truly is/was "un-English" then this line of argument, if applied to the modern city, or the one of the 1960s, should follow.

The reality of the issues on this front are that any pointed questions along the lines of "how English did you feel in the 1960s" would be so vague as to elicit confusion and bafflement. As discussed in the Methodology, the translation of popular concepts, considerations, or identities can sometimes prove difficult to give solid academic footing and vice versa. The accumulation of evidence in an oral history interview is a method that necessitates the collation of interweaving, vague, and often half-thought ideas into a relatively strict academic framework. In this case, such a question as suggested above would not have been acceptable. However, framing questions through the personalised experiences of the oral history subjects by way of reference to related issues, proved to be a way around this issue.

Therefore, the extent to which "non-Englishness" manifested itself in other ways was quite revealing. For example, a hostility to London was clearly apparent throughout the research evidence and this definitely was something that was appreciated at the time. The same applies, albeit to a lesser extent, to the question of a broader north/south divide. In addition, the manner in which Liverpool was presented in class terms is also revealing, and somewhat more tangible than a vague reference to "un-Englishness". This chapter seeks to address these issues and provide analysis on the extent to which Liverpool was indeed an "un-English" city at this time.

The obvious question to be addressed in this chapter is the extent to which Liverpool fits in to the paradigms discussed both above and in the literature review. Liverpool is without a shadow of a doubt an English city. As aforementioned it is, at the time of writing, still located on the north-west coast of a country called England, subject

to the laws of the English and Welsh legal system, within the same time zone as the rest of England, and travel between England and Merseyside does not yet require a border check. Yet Liverpool is sometimes described in terms that would suggest it is totally alien to Englishness and to England. Part of the substantial problem here is that Englishness is often left undefined as anything other than an extremely vague, overarching identity whose lack of definition is convenient in allowing attestation to Liverpool's apartness to be plainly self-apparent.

Belchem attempts to situate Liverpool's 'apartness' by suggesting that it operates or operated "outside the main narrative frameworks of modern British history" and that, "Liverpool's past has been characterised as different".<sup>189</sup> Liverpool: "this northern outpost of 'gentlemanly capitalism' was the least 'English' of the great Victorian provincial cities".<sup>190</sup> It had "...a seafaring cosmopolitanism which made Liverpool, gateway of Empire, particularly receptive to (unEnglish) foreign ideas and to American popular music".<sup>191</sup> These examples are not especially helpful in trying to understand, or quantify, precisely what this rhetoric means. This type of writing persists throughout Belchem's work: "facing out to sea, with its back turned on England, Liverpool is a place apart, a city on the edge",<sup>192</sup> for example. The clear issues here are that firstly what is 'English' is left undefined and secondly that much more specificity is required when defining the time period in which Liverpool's 'unEnglishness' is being discussed. This is not to suggest that Belchem is at fault here, more that these terms are notable for their lack of definition *per se* and that confidently defining a city as a whole against those terms provides a problem.

As has been examined in the Literature Review, to define a city as 'unEnglish' can mean opposition to an enormous number of different things at different times. As a bulwark against a rural, insular and WASP-ish identity, it may seem reasonable to paint Liverpool as 'unEnglish', particularly at a time when the city was none of those things – for example, as Belchem identifies, a period, the height of Empire, where it could be argued that Liverpool was uniquely cosmopolitan. However, there are certain aspects of Englishness with which Liverpool should feel affinity. Perhaps the most obvious is the British Empire. British though the Empire was, its nucleus was certainly southern, and

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<sup>189</sup> Belchem, *Merseypride*, p. xxx.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.* p. xxxi.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.* p. xxxi.

<sup>192</sup> J. Belchem, *Liverpool: City of Radicals*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2011), p. 1.

English, but this did not stop the identification of Liverpool as the ‘Second City of Empire’. That Liverpool was oftentimes described in this manner does not imply a reluctance to engage with one of the key totems of British or English identity since the establishment of said empire. Tied into this, too, is the problem with defining Liverpool as a port city and consequently un-English, when a key part of the *national* psyche has revolved around merchant enterprise, commercialism, and other naval excursions. Perhaps one of the most famous examples of British nationalism captured in song is Elgar’s *Pomp and Circumstance*, in which the claim that “Britannia rules the waves” is one of the most well-known refrains in the Anglophonic musical sphere. The question of whether the ‘seafaring’ aspect of the ‘seafaring cosmopolitanism’ is what marks Liverpool out as apart, or different, is therefore wrought with issues. A discussion on cosmopolitanism will take place in Chapter Two.

The discussion of Englishness and Britishness undertaken in the Literature Review of this thesis provided some of the ways in which these terms have been defined in recent years. Alternative ways of considering this question must be taken into account. Attempting to define Englishness in the manner done there is unlikely to provide precisely the right context when trying to understand how ordinary Liverpoolians saw their places within these structures of identity. Enormous care must be taken, too, to understand the context in which the claims of being ‘un-English’ were made. Both Belchem and du Noyer wrote in the late-90s and early-2000s at a time where Liverpool was just starting to come out of two decades of events that created a very particular view of the city within the wider national imagination. Four events, the Heysel and Hillsborough football disasters, the emergence of the Militant Tendency on the Liverpool City Council, the riots in Toxteth, and the death of James Bulger, all combined to create an image of a city that did not fit in with the ostensible ‘progress’ that had been made elsewhere in the country.

Characterisations of Liverpool as ‘apart’ were evident in much of the media in this period. For example, *The Sunday Telegraph*, in the aftermath of the Hillsborough disaster, suggested a grim inevitability to the fact that it involved Liverpoolians, “where else could it be but Liverpool? Indulgent in its agony, living out the slightly odd, detached role in late 20<sup>th</sup> century British life. A Catholic Calcutta, dying on its knees, praying for resurrection with soccer its shattered faith and manager Kenny Dalglish its

saviour.”<sup>193</sup> Detachment and apartness cut to the core message of this piece – Liverpool was presented as a place where bad things happened, where the nature of its people led it to be indulgent in its agony. Going further, “the conflict between their perception of where they live as a land fit for heroes, cruelly blighted by adversity and the world’s frequent view of it as a self-inflicted wound in the side of England continues to grow...it has also become clear that something must be done to persuade them of advantages of continuing membership of the United Kingdom”.<sup>194</sup> This kind of discussion is rather shocking from a position in 2018, it clearly points to a perceived difference that is quantifiable, at least in popular discourse. Liverpool was a self-inflicted wound that was supposedly reluctant to be a member of the United Kingdom – although on the second point, it seems more likely that it was a reference to Liverpool perceived relative economic and social backwardness, rather than some sort of pseudo-separatist movement.

Also from the Hillsborough coverage was an interview with Liverpool DJ John Peel, in which the city’s supposed apartness was explicitly defined, “what fascinates him about Liverpool is its separateness from the rest of the country, ‘like an Italian city-state or a Greek polis’ – its otherness”.<sup>195</sup> This kind of comment reached its peak, or nadir, with a piece by Jonathan Margolis in *The Sunday Times* following the murder of James Bulger, entitled “SELF-PITY CITY”, in which the opprobrium directed straight at the city was blunt, uncompromising, and unforgiving. Examples of the commentary contained within this piece include, “the ‘well, that’s Liverpool’ argument runs something like this. Yes, this is a self-pitying and incipiently barbaric culture, but the people really are tremendously friendly and humorous. Perhaps it’s the Irish in them, but they are emotional, wear their hearts on their sleeves and you have to respect the, err, current depth of their emotions...Liverpool culture seems nevertheless to combine defeatism and hollow-cheeked depression with a cloying mawkishness”.<sup>196</sup> The final example of this attitude was displayed in a *Spectator* editorial following the beheading of the Liverpudlian Ken Bigley in Iraq in 2004. Although often attributed to Boris Johnson, it was actually written by Simon Heffer, in it was a claim that, “an excessive predilection for welfarism have created a peculiar, and deeply unattractive, psyche among many

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<sup>193</sup> ‘Such an unlucky city’, *The Sunday Telegraph*, (23 April 1989).

<sup>194</sup> ‘Such an unlucky city’, *The Sunday Telegraph*, (23 April 1989).

<sup>195</sup> J. Sweeney, ‘City of Grief’, *The Observer*, (23 April 1989).

<sup>196</sup> J. Margolis, ‘Self-Pity City’, *The Sunday Times*, (28 February 1993).

Liverpudlians. They see themselves whenever possible as victims and resent their victim status; yet at the same time they wallow in it".<sup>197</sup> The strength of writing in this regard is fairly unique, but it was the culmination of a series of tragedies to befall the city. The same cannot be said for the period under examination for this thesis.

The point of the above, therefore, is not to provide an evidence base for the research in this thesis, but instead to explain the cultural and media atmosphere in which Liverpool was thought of at different times. Extreme care must be taken, when thinking of this idea, to not transpose ideas from the 1980s and 1990s into the 1960s and instead to only consider the period under examination for this thesis within its own context. Ideas on Liverpool's apartness, or exceptionalism, or otherness were on the fringe of the mainstream at this time and, influenced further by television programmes like Alan Bleasdale's *Boys from the Blackstuff*, Carla Lane's *Liver Birds*, or even Harry Enfield's tracksuit-clad 'Scousers' from his sketch programme, it is of paramount importance to not allow these later cultural creations affect the evidence from the 1960s.

Greater clarity comes, therefore, when one moves away from attempting to conclusively define Englishness. If it is to be accepted as one of the concomitant nationalities that makes up the United Kingdom, then it is possible to move on to ways in which the Liverpudlian 'apartness' becomes far more comprehensible. Rather than thinking about Englishness that is something which is definable and graspable, there are different ways in which this 'apartness' can be effectively examined. For example, rather than thinking of Englishness as a singular identity against which Liverpool can be defined, there are a series of ways in which it is possible to understand Liverpool's place as a city in Britain, which will be examined below. The first is to understand that the 'not English' terminology was often used as a synonym for 'not London'. The second (although very closely linked) idea is to see how Liverpool fits in with a wider North/South divide idea – if Liverpool truly is exceptional, one would expect it to stand out of this classic method of provincialism that has been rife in modern British thinking. Alongside this runs an accumulation of evidence on how the 'Liverpool Sound' was representative of wider questions of exceptionalism. Finally, this thesis will provide thoughts on how Liverpool can be explained as a product of class divisions within

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<sup>197</sup> *The Spectator*, October 2004: <http://www.spectator.co.uk/2004/10/bigleys-fate/> [accessed 15 October 2017].

Britain and whether extreme care should be taken in thinking about, or promoting, the exceptionalism of ever smaller sites of identity formulation, where more satisfying answers can be found through the lens of class. An addendum to this final section will be examination of how women and girls were presented within the Merseybeat phenomenon – the ‘Scouse’ identity has been explained as one that is white and working-class but, also, male.

### *The North-South Divide in the 1960s.*

As already explained, the actual manifestation of themes such as ‘Englishness’ never really rear their heads in any of the evidence. Rather, certainly in the press, Liverpool is portrayed as being at loggerheads, or in rivalry, with London. This theme was particularly evident in the research gathered for this thesis, where any idea that Liverpool was in any way ‘not English’ was sorely lacking. The Literature Review provided a discussion on the issue of London and the North-South divide in general terms and this section will attempt to use a handful of secondary case studies to showcase existing writing on these issues the 1950s and 1960s.

The elevation of London as a lightning rod for much of what frustrated Northern Englishmen and women is clear in a number of different sources. Dave Russell’s analysis of northern hostility towards London through a variety of different media is extremely helpful in trying to explain how this mentality arose. On literature, Russell claims that this provided the most help in trying to tie together an understanding of how London portrayed other places and how it was itself portrayed. Claiming that David Storey’s *Flight Into Camden* provided “a suitable leitmotif for the 1950s and 1960s and those who stayed [in the North], such as Stan Barstow, or who returned, such as Sid Chaplin, ‘resented constantly being asked *why* they chose to live in the North, as if they were displaying some deplorable eccentricity”.<sup>198</sup> With that in mind, however, Russell also claimed that there was a considerable difference between the writing for the press and the writings done by way of works of fiction, “the complex mix of emotions engendered by southward migration coloured much writing. Whereas in the sports press and around the sports field, on the variety stage and in the pages of the dialect press,

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<sup>198</sup> Russell, *Looking North*, p. 95.



London was often reduced to a relatively simple formula variously defining it as pretentious, decadent, wasteful and generally morally inferior to the North, these often autobiographically inflected fictions often provided a more thoughtful, multi-faceted treatment”.<sup>199</sup> This pattern will be displayed, too, in the contrast between the oral history evidence and that found in the newspapers. Russell, too, explained the tendency for novels of the 1950s and 1960s to document the path taken south by the enterprising northerner. He claims that, “Billy Fisher’s ultimately unfulfilled love affair with an idealised version of the capital is central to Waterhouse’s *Billy Liar*, while an actual move south frames Storey’s *Flight into Camden* and *Saville*, Stan Barstow’s *The Watchers on the Shore* (1965) and *The Right True End* (1976), Melvyn Bragg’s *Kingdom Come* (1980)...and much else...many pictures of the capital and its surrounds, both in fiction and the discourses around it, were undeniably hostile and fed into the powerful critiques of metropolitan dominance embedded into all cultural arenas. There was much anger among northern writers and commentators that the capital drained the regions of its talent...these sentiments can be found at any point but were most likely to surface at moments when the economic balance of power was shifting south”.<sup>200</sup> The talent drain, too, is a theme that appears in the research evidence for this thesis.

On music, Russell is more circumspect. Directly addressing Merseybeat, he claims that the North’s moment was over by 1963 and that, “while the general popularity of northern themes and locations probably helped facilitate the industry’s need for novelty, the sheer talent of the Beatles and the persistence of their manager Brian Epstein in pursuing their cause, were probably largely peculiar to the music industry...as in most other areas of cultural life, music was heavily influenced by the turn to ‘swinging London’ from the mid-1960s, a phenomenon which both drew much northern and provincial talent to the capital and placed southern bands such as the Rolling Stones, the Who, the Small Faces and the Kinks in the foreground.”<sup>201</sup> Russell, therefore, plays up the particular characteristics of the music industry in explaining its unique reach in this area. His point that this was a moment, too, must also not be lost. As will be explained later in this chapter, the Merseybeat phenomenon was a short-lived one and its limitations must be acknowledged.

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<sup>199</sup> *Ibid*, p. 95.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 95-6.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid* p. 214.

Rob Shields, in *Places on the Margin*, effectively explains how realist cinema in the 1950s and 1960s constructed a version of the north that was played on for years to come. Building on the literary constructions of the North, Shields claims that the framing shots of power transmission pylons, gas works, and old industrial buildings were “far from realist, these shots are entirely selective and *conventionalistic* in that they do not challenge commonsensical, ‘folksy’, categorisations of the region, thereby framing and presenting a one-sided vision of the ‘North’”.<sup>202</sup> Shields further claims that these films promoted an image of the “Northern Working Class [as] an invention cast as the foreign ‘Other’ of the socially constructed orderliness of the British nation centred around London. Class imagery again collapses into spatial imagery. But at the same time, this Other is reappropriated into a cultural framework in which it is allocated a subsidiary position...the naturalness and ‘transparency’ of these shots is the sign of an external, London-centred, political authority and economic power which is in turn legitimised in the films”.<sup>203</sup> Finally, on economics, Shields notes how the idea of post-war affluence was framed in London-centric terms, “there is also a clear appeal to people to share, *on the basis of their own experiences of post-war affluence*, in the characters’ traumatic experiences of leaving their homes and communities to go out into the world (usually to London) and the subsequent problems that come with success and affluence”.<sup>204</sup> These films, therefore, placed that post-war affluence within the orbit of London – the leaving of the North was crucial to sharing in this post-war affluence. This theme will be picked up in the evidence.

The North-South divide of the 1950s and 1960s, therefore, was not one that became as entrenched and vicious as that of the 1980s. The impact of the North-South divide on the Liverpool of the 1960s was mixed.

## **Section 1: Questions of Northernness**

### *Liverpool vs London: Marginalisation, Authenticity, and Difference.*

Trying to discover the ways in which any of the interviewees defined themselves as being ‘not English’ was instructive of the problems with such formulations. Frankie Connor, for example, when asked about whether he sympathised with the ‘we’re not

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<sup>202</sup> R. Shields, *Places on the Margin*, p. 218.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 218-9.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid*, p. 221.

English we are Scouse' idea suggested, "no, that's not me. A lot of people have said that Liverpool is an island – a kind of island mentality. I'm part of the UK, a great country, whatever people perceive of England these days. Liverpool is to me a great city in a great country...we're just a city within a country, I've never thought of us as outsiders".<sup>205</sup> That being said, however, he was far more willing to discuss how he felt marginalised by London and was particularly keen to explain how 'southerners' looked down upon 'northerners'. This pattern repeated itself throughout the research evidence. Asking whether someone felt 'English' or not at any point in time did not provide any satisfying answers – Connor's above being the most articulate – but asking specifically about London encouraged some of the interviewees to remember their feelings of marginalisation at the time.

Liverpool is often defined in terms opposed to London in the research material gathered for this thesis. Historically, London has been held up as the behemoth against which Liverpool had to compete. This narrative has been traced by Belchem to the perceived monopolistic practices of metropolitan London in Liverpool's pursuit of trade with the outposts of Empire. Provincialism, it is suggested, reigned supreme and had a commercial hue. Belchem points to the perceived unfair practices that were undertaken by Londoners against Liverpoolian enterprises – in a satirical poster billing referring to a visit by James Morris, a director of the Bank of England, Morris was described as "a South Country horse, 11 ½ hands high, sent here with a false pedigree...he is ascertained to have been got by Monopoly, trained in Threadneedle Street, where he has been used by an Old Lady, who has got a Patent, for making Rags into Money, and who prosecutes anyone else that attempts to follow the same trade. Though not vicious in other respects, 'COCKNEY', like all London-bred horses, is very jealous of those bred in the North, particularly Liverpool".<sup>206</sup> This anti-London mentality manifested itself in other ways, too. The apocryphal piece of daubed graffiti in the tunnel at Lime Street station achieved a level of certain notoriety among football fans in more violence-infested days. Paul du Noyer ruminated on said graffiti when remembering his move to London, "when I first came to this city many years ago, I had never met a Londoner. The train pulled out of my home town, Liverpool, past the welcoming slogan daubed for

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<sup>205</sup> Oral testimony from Frankie Connor, recorded by the author, 4 October 2015.

<sup>206</sup> Posting Bill found in Belchem, *Merseypride*, p. 48.

visiting football fans – ‘Cockneys Die’. Would I find anything friendlier when I reached Euston?”.<sup>207</sup>

For this sub-section, the feelings tended to be articulated in one of two ways – either a belief that Liverpool, and Liverpudlians, were marginalised or felt in some way ‘apart’ from London in fairly abstract, woolly terms, or through the specific recognition that Liverpool did not have a recording studio, and that this created a sense of superiority from the studios based in London. There was, in addition, a definite sense of rivalry between the two cities, with the national music papers carrying letters and opinion articles on the state of the ‘Liverpool vs London’ rivalry.

The starting point for this section is that vague sense of marginalisation felt by Liverpudlians towards London. With regard to Merseybeat, there were often articles posted in the *Mersey Beat* newspaper that lamented a feeling of being ignored by national newspapers, music or general, that did not cast their gaze beyond the borders of the capital. The first identifiable (owing to *Mersey Beat*’s incomplete archive in both the Liverpool Central and British Libraries) example of this emerges in early 1962, where a front page of *Mersey Beat* implored “London – take a look up north!”.<sup>208</sup> In this, *Mersey Beat* took to task the writer of an article in *Jazz News*, then supposedly Britain’s most popular jazz weekly, for not paying enough attention to Liverpool, “obviously the columnist lacks knowledge of the entertainment scene in Liverpool. Bob Wooller, who recently compiled a list of nearly three hundred Merseyside groups, had a chuckle when he noticed the typically British understatement, ‘somewhere around 25 at least’”.<sup>209</sup> London was also used as a frame of reference to show the perceived quality of the Liverpool groups at this time, for example: “in Mersey Beat, Merseyside and the North has found a voice in the entertainment world to equal that of London”<sup>210</sup> and “in rock and roll, Liverpool is Britain’s centre. We may not have recording studios, television centres, radio stations – but there are more groups in Liverpool than anywhere else – including London – and they are of an exceptional standard”.<sup>211</sup> London is therefore both used as a convenient method by which Liverpudlian writers claimed that they were being marginalised, and a way in which Liverpool groups were promoted as being

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<sup>207</sup> P. du Noyer, *In the City: A Celebration of London Music*, (London: Virgin, 2009), p. ix.

<sup>208</sup> *Mersey Beat*, 8-22 February 1962.

<sup>209</sup> *Mersey Beat*, 8-22 February 1962.

<sup>210</sup> *Mersey Beat*, 12-26 July 1962.

<sup>211</sup> *Mersey Beat*, 13 December 1962 – 3 January 1963.

outstanding. London was, therefore, both the standard to which journals like *Mersey Beat* held Liverpool music and the *bête noir* responsible for the way in which it was supposedly being ignored.

This theme continued into April 1963 with the irritation that London was seen as the only place in Britain where a group could get noticed and establish a respectable career. Liverpool's lack of facilities when compared to the capital was raised with the question, "what have we got? There are [sic] no radio, television or recording studios. Entertainers will have to travel down to London to achieve anything. However, Merseyside does have a voice – Mersey Beat – which for almost two years has been requesting London to take a look up north. Mersey Beat is now determined to keep Liverpool in the lead. If Liverpool had a recording studio then the title, 'Britain's Nashville' would be justified".<sup>212</sup> A follow up letter in the next edition commented that, "leading A and R men from London all agree that the standard of the Merseyside groups is the highest in the country".<sup>213</sup> London is therefore held up as being a key adjudicator of quality but Liverpool's apparent superiority to London with music is still repeatedly made. This frustration is clear to see in this way – London is both depicted as somewhere that Liverpudlians should dislike, but also the only way in which groups could get the exposure to the facilities, equipment and other talent required in order to become nationally successful. The direct nature of Bill Harry's editorials in *Mersey Beat* reached its apogee in mid-1963 where he suggested that there was a kickback from 'London VIPs' against Liverpool groups. This was, he implies, rooted in jealousy:

Liverpool, a unique musical scene, has slapped the record industry sideways with the sudden influx of numerous first-class groups. This scene had been ignored for years. No other city has such talent, such original freshness and vitality – and London welcomed Merseyside artistes with open arms. Perhaps down South they became frightened – the scene up North was becoming too big. Perhaps, the London VIPS thought, the scene is getting too big, let's unsell it. How can we take the attention away from Merseyside? There's a new Manchester noise! The scene will explode in Glasgow. The Liverpool influence on the national pop world is evident – but the takeover bid is disgraceful. The cry from the southern VIPS is 'we're fed up with Liverpool, let's have a change'.<sup>214</sup>

On the one hand, there are clear exceptionalist tones about Liverpool here – '*no other city has such talent, such original freshness...*' yet on the other hand are semi-

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<sup>212</sup> *Mersey Beat*, 11-25 April 1963.

<sup>213</sup> *Mersey Beat*, 25 April – 9 May 1963.

<sup>214</sup> *Mersey Beat*, 4-12 July 1963.

conspiratorial theories put forward that these mysterious ‘London VIPs’ just could not bear to see Liverpool succeed for any longer. The incredibly dubious claim in a later article that “talent from Liverpool seems to be inexhaustible” can perhaps explain why Harry spoke in these terms.

The national newspapers also carried a number of examples of the ‘rivalry’ between Liverpool and London but, curiously, the relationship was often inverted. A letter from a writer in Essex in *Melody Maker* in 1963, for example, bemoaned the writer’s idea that, “to be successful, it seems you have to be from the North. But nobody stops to think of the better groups in the South. It’s about time people realised that great southern groups like Cliff Bennett and the Rebel Rousers and the Thunderbirds can’t get a hit in edgeways because of the record-buying public thinking that the ‘New Sound’ is confined to Northern groups only. Let’s hear more of our own groups down in the South”.<sup>215</sup> On the same pages two girls wrote, “a ready asked recently, ‘how many more Merseyside groups have we to endure?’. Our question is, ‘how much more nasty, jealous criticism have we on Merseyside to endure?’. All the Liverpool groups had to work hard for their success. Record contracts weren’t dropped into their laps. Everyone must face the fact that Liverpool is the centre of the Beat, and we think it will be for a long time”.<sup>216</sup>

The oral history evidence is particularly helpful, here, and provides a view on both this and the wider Liverpool/London paradigm that gives more qualification to the examples examined so far. Kingsize Taylor articulated an interesting slant on the London issue by suggesting that it was common knowledge that northern groups would be ignored. Relaying a conversation with a former manager, he recalled asking, “I said to him, ‘how come while we’re on the road, why can’t go south?’ ‘Cos they won’t like you’. I said, ‘how come?’. ‘Just the way it is – anything south of Watford, forget it.’ That’s where the whole Watford, change your money at Watford, that’s what all the bands said. That’s the way it was in those days. People say it didn’t happen, but it bloody did! There was no way you could get down there – all you got was ‘you wouldn’t like it down there, there’s no point’”.<sup>217</sup> Frankie Connor spoke in similar terms, with the common Watford refrain emerging again: “maybe the Beatles’ success took them by surprise – how dare

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<sup>215</sup> *Melody Maker*, 29 June 1963.

<sup>216</sup> *Melody Maker*, 29 June 1963.

<sup>217</sup> Oral testimony from Ted ‘Kingsize’ Taylor, recorded by the author, 10 January 2017.

they be successful from up north? People in London think the M6 is cobbled. I don't subscribe to the bias. I've got friends from down south. But they're always a bit...you know...north of Watford and we've got straw in our mouths and woollybacks!".<sup>218</sup>

The belief that London was the only place to achieve success ran through the evidence collected for this thesis. The need to go down to London to gain any recognition on a national scale was echoed by Chris Huston, who recognised that, "[Liverpool] was the red-headed stepchild of England back then. You had to go to London to be in the music business...even Brian Epstein had to go down to London to get a recording contract. Liverpool didn't have a say-so in what was happening musically in England back then – they had to go to London to be in the business".<sup>219</sup> The lack of recording facilities in Liverpool was clearly a huge factor. Upon being asked why a fellow bandmate left of his own accord for London, Frankie Connor claimed, "...it dawned upon us. London. The agents are down there. EMI, Parlophone. Olympic Studios, Trident. The Cavern opened a studio in '65 called Cavern Sound, a lot of money spent on it. It was a complete failure."<sup>220</sup> David Boyce, too: "I suppose subconsciously, even consciously, one knew that if you were going to 'make it' in any sphere then you'd probably have to go to London to do that".<sup>221</sup> This small group, therefore, did not paint London in the adversarial terms that many of the newspapers did, but rather framed London simply as a place where someone would have to go to be successful. In the actual conduct of these interviews, there was never any resentment towards the city, more the recognition that London had the facilities that Liverpool did not. That being said, London was still very clearly placed in a position of considerable privilege and Liverpool in one of marginality. In these instances, there were few examples of outright hostility, but instead ones of inevitability and acceptance. Connor again ruminated on acquaintances wistfully, first with one of his friends and bandmates, "that was the start of the Hideaways as regards a group as a five piece. That was together for two years that group, that lineup, 'till Judd left us – ambitions for London, bigger things. And rightly so looking back as well",<sup>222</sup> and Brian Epstein, "Epstein moved the whole office to London. It all went down and that was the city more or less left out to dry in many ways. Brian

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<sup>218</sup> Oral testimony from Frankie Connor, recorded by the author, 4 October 2015.

<sup>219</sup> Oral testimony from Chris Huston, recorded by the author, 3 November 2016.

<sup>220</sup> Oral testimony from Frankie Connor, recorded by the author, 4 October 2015.

<sup>221</sup> Oral testimony from David Boyce, recorded by the author, 27 January 2016.

<sup>222</sup> Oral testimony from Frankie Connor, recorded by the author, 4 October 2015.

went down, rightly so. London was the place to be. We didn't have a studio to record in, nothing up here."<sup>223</sup> Migration out of Liverpool was a feature of the city for much of the twentieth century. Indeed, between 1951 and 1971, the city lost c. 177,000 people from its population.<sup>224</sup> Whilst it is impossible to say whether this population went to London, or moved into suburbs, this decline is representative of a city which longer held opportunities for many.

This is about as hostile as the interviewees claimed that they were towards London. Many provided a balance that was fairly lacking in the newspaper archives. For example, Albie Donnelly remembered a fear of going down to London, but explained how this was most likely born out of ignorance than any informed, deep-rooted and possibly lived experience:

They were always a bit afraid of going to London. Because it was always..."the thing about London is!" ...well I never knew what the thing about London was! When we played down there we were found to be highly amusing. And err...there were always people who'd say 'we bloody hate Scousers' and we'd go, 'well Scousers bloody hate Cockneys!', but [they'd] probably never met a Cockney. I think basically people were scared of it. Once you grow up a bit you realise that all the best bands in London were full of Scotsmen, Manchester and so on. Some of them were London people.<sup>225</sup>

Donnelly, therefore, provides some of the tropes associated with the Liverpool-London relationship, but placed them firmly within the boundaries of ignorance. When asked if he could confirm that people were not overly keen on London, he was forthcoming but, by his own admission, was unable to recall any particular reason as to why. David Boyce provided a class framework to this issue, saying that:

It's partly a class thing, this. My...I'd been to London lots of times when I was a kid. My father's brother worked in London and lived in Surrey. So, for me, London wasn't...it was the capital of the country and it was just somewhere you went from time to time. I think that was the case with most of my friends at school...there wasn't that insularity which I think spawns prejudice...if anything I wanted to live in London and I ended up living in London and from the music point of view the interesting thing is that the bands that did become successful – obviously the best example being the Beatles – they were out of Liverpool like a flash.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>224</sup> [https://web.archive.org/web/20090725030610/http://vision.edina.ac.uk/data\\_cube\\_table\\_page.jsp?data\\_theme=T\\_POP&data\\_cube=N\\_Pop\\_Ch&id=10105821&c\\_id=10001043&add=N#](https://web.archive.org/web/20090725030610/http://vision.edina.ac.uk/data_cube_table_page.jsp?data_theme=T_POP&data_cube=N_Pop_Ch&id=10105821&c_id=10001043&add=N#) [Accessed 31/10/2019].

<sup>225</sup> Oral testimony from Albie Donnelly, recorded by the author, 17 November 2015.

<sup>226</sup> Oral testimony from David Boyce, recorded by the author, 27 January 2016.



Boyce made clear that he had a very comfortable, middle-class upbringing that included his attendance at a minor public school on the Wirral but was open about how this affected his outlook on London as a place. As ‘just somewhere you went from time to time’ it was not built up in his mind into a strange behemoth that was suppressing Liverpool talent, but instead a fairly benign city that he might want to move to in the future. Both cases say the same thing, that exposure to London made the hostility disappear. It does raise the question as to whether this was a constructed rivalry, or at least one that has no place in rational consideration. This is not to say that it did not exist – the evidence provided so far shows that it very much did – but rather that trying to understand the specifics of what it was *based on* is an exceptionally difficult task.

Brian Jones explained how he held no opinion at all about London, owing to the success of the local scene. “I don’t think there was resentment about it. Because even though we hadn’t evolved outside this area, it was massive within this area. So, if you think about it, there were 292 bands in Liverpool and every one of those bands used to play in Liverpool on a Saturday night. I mean some of these places used to have three or four bands on. It gives you an idea of how many venues there were. But the London thing wasn’t really that important because we had all the work here”.<sup>227</sup> In this case, the local frameworks were more than enough to sustain Jones’ musical tastes and, because of that, there was no need to think nationally at what might have been. In this context, therefore, away from the need to possibly create a story in a locally, or nationally, syndicated newspaper, the attitudes of those like Brian Jones was far more nuanced and, in reality, probably far less concerned about whatever it was London was accused of being. Whilst the local scene was as vibrant as it was, there was no need to even think about the effect that London was having on local talent.

It should be made clear that the press did not solely contain Liverpoolian hostility towards London, either. Though Liverpool may have been ahead of the curve in music, members of The Searchers were not shy from declaring its lack of cutting edge in fashion: “the boys very much like it in London. They have all been furiously buying clothes and rushing around to all the most fashionable shops. ‘Liverpool is so far behind’, they said. ‘London is certainly the best place to obtain fashionable clothes. And we are currently taking advantage of it while we are in London!’”.<sup>228</sup> In a tongue-in-

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<sup>227</sup> Oral testimony from Brian Jones, recorded by the author, 6 September 2017.

<sup>228</sup> *New Record Mirror*, 27 July 1963.

cheek article featuring Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones, the NME described how relations between London and Liverpool had thawed:

The Iron Curtain has been breached, friendly relations have at last been established and representatives from London have succeeded in creating goodwill in the opposition's capital! I am referring to the invisible barrier which has for so long divided London and Liverpool and which the Rolling Stones have finally penetrated. "You know, you hear some talk about the animosity which some Liverpool musicians and fans feel towards London groups, but it just isn't true! Everyone was really friendly!" [Jagger]. The explanation for the Rolling Stones' widespread popularity in the North undoubtedly lies in their style – which is raw, exciting, down-to-earth and strongly r-and-b flavoured. This is the music Liverpool loves. It's closer to their own Mersey Beat than anything else south of a line from the Humber to the Bristol Channel.<sup>229</sup>

This provides an interesting angle on the Liverpool-London relationship as it is both acknowledged and dismissed within a couple of sentences. This adds to the idea that the rivalry was something that mainly existed within the pages of the print, and other, media and not elsewhere. The NME in 1964, for example contributed to this by acknowledging the Liverpool-London rivalry, and manner in which London could no longer be considered the epicentre of British popular music:

there was a time that London could regard itself as the hub of the British pop music scene – the nucleus from which all our musical entertainment flowed. But the background to pop music has changed radically. Although 1963 will be remembered as the year of the Beatles it will also go down in pop history as the era in which the provinces came into their own. In the past any aspiring provincial artist has had to travel down to London in an attempt to seek his fame or fortune there. But today the tables are turned – London itself reaching out to the provinces in their search. And the reason for this remarkable change is that, in countless areas throughout Britain, new sounds are being born. Sounds which are distinctive to the district in question. Major honours have, of course, been thrust upon Liverpool. Deservedly so because this city has given the lead to all other regions. But it is rapidly becoming more obvious that Merseyside is not alone in challenging London's supremacy. Many other regions are swarming to attack, disputing Liverpool's acknowledged position as champion of the provinces.<sup>230</sup>

Vitaly, however, even this acknowledgment comes with caveats. Liverpool is one among many provinces with a sound. It is still London reaching out to those provinces. Additionally, the idea that groups did not have to come down to London, as this piece suggests, was clearly wrong, as shown.

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<sup>229</sup> *New Musical Express*, 15 November 1963.

<sup>230</sup> *New Musical Express*, 21 February 1964.

The issue on this front, therefore, that must be considered is the extent to which this rivalry/feeling of marginalisation actually can actually be based on something identifiable. David Boyce, for example, was adamant that the entire movement was a media creation more than anything: “there’s a big myth about the whole Mersey Beat thing. It got turned into a big thing by first of all the British press...you may have discovered this...I’m certain that the term ‘the Mersey Sound’ was coined by some newspaper guy. I never heard it referred to as that in the early days.”<sup>231</sup> If this is the case, then it is not beyond the realms of possibility that a semi-fabricated angle suggesting a deep-seated rivalry between the two cities was as well.

As a corollary of the sense of marginalisation, the inevitability of Liverpool groups moving to London was a particular bugbear of *Mersey Beat* at this time. In many ways, London was depicted as a place where Liverpool groups would go and lose their innate ‘Liverpool-ness’. The Remo Four were praised for “staying in Liverpool. They have had a chance to improve and develop and are content to be a top group here.”<sup>232</sup> This mentality was also evident in the national music press. The *New Musical Express* carried an interview with the Beatles in March 1963, wherein it was claimed that “if there’s one thing the Beatles are determined on it’s not to move to London. They’ve a great fondness for their home city, Liverpool. ‘We love the place’, said Paul. ‘We all met at school there and it’s where we got our first big breaks. The fans were, and still are, terrific. They make us feel somebody’”.<sup>233</sup> Pressure was placed on groups to stay in Liverpool and not succumb to whatever may have been on offer in London. At the early stages of the Beatles’ national success, the occasional piece referred to the seeming inevitability of their move down south. On Londoners, it was asked, “but what do [The Beatles] think of Londoners? ‘Not much, if they know you come from the North they don’t want to know’. The boys have told me they’re going to have to spread their wings a bit if they want to become known throughout the country, instead of mainly on Merseyside. One girl said, ‘eh lads, if you have a hit record you’ll go to London, then we won’t see you anymore. You’ve gorra [sic] stay in Liverpool. You’re OURS’”.<sup>234</sup> The manner in which the Beatles were very careful with their language here is instructive –

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<sup>231</sup> Oral testimony from David Boyce, recorded by the author 27 January 2016.

<sup>232</sup> *Mersey Beat*, 22 February – 8 March 1963.

<sup>233</sup> *New Musical Express*, 8 March 1963.

<sup>234</sup> *Mersey Beat*, 1-15 November 1962.

on the one hand criticising Londoners in a manner that would please the readers of *Mersey Beat*, but on the other laying the groundwork for their eventual departure. It raises the question, certainly among the groups, as to whether this resentment of London was actually something they believed in or whether it was instead used as a convenient publicity tool to help drive a story.

What is clear, however, is the belief that once the entire Beatles operation moved down to London, the Merseybeat phenomenon ceased to be something uniquely Liverpool. Frankie Connor again, “Epstein moved the whole office to London. It all went down and that was the city then more or less left out to dry in many ways”.<sup>235</sup> Some, like Kingsize Taylor, were far more forceful on the matter. Taylor, describing an argument with a prominent member of the Mersey Beat phenomenon, suggested that his own move to Hamburg was different to the wider move to London because he claimed that he would, “never forsake Liverpool, I was backwards and forwards the whole time, unlike [said person] who sold his soul to the devil and had his head up Eppy’s [Epstein’s] arse so much that you went down to bloody London to work with him...he actually was part of the cause of destroying Mersey Sound”.<sup>236</sup> Huge care must be taken with this particular testimony as the frustration Taylor explained was mainly aimed at both Brian Epstein and the individual in question, but the fact remains that the offending behaviour here was the act of moving to London. What Taylor describes as the ‘authentic’ Liverpool Sound for him ended once a significant number of groups left for London.

Similarly, Mal Jefferson was scornful of this attitude, claiming that ‘London’ stood in the way of progress for Liverpool groups and, crucially, of only wanting to produce music that was going to be nationally popular, rather than indulging the creative, esoteric, and alternative styles of what he felt the Merseybeat phenomenon was defined as,

they came up to plunder us of bands. The Beatles obviously went to London and signed in London, but they came up looking for bands. The prime example of that is Oriol coming to do the *This Is Merseybeat* album. I’ve got the master here. They...I was on it at the gig. I was doing Muddy Waters and way out blues that the Stones would do later. I was doing Boom Boom John Lee Hooker and stuff like that. They didn’t want that on a London label, they wanted ‘I Love You, You Love Me ticky ticky’, that’s what they were looking for and what they recorded. Anybody...they didn’t want that sort of excitement

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<sup>235</sup> Oral testimony from Frankie Connor, recorded by the author, 4 October 2015.

<sup>236</sup> Oral testimony from Ted ‘Kingsize’ Taylor, recorded by the author, 10 January 2017.

they just wanted ticky ticky songs that they thought might make singles. Bands did peculiar stuff. Rory Storm did Beautiful Dreamer and no-one knows the chords.<sup>237</sup>

Rather, therefore, than London representing some sort of 'edge' or dynamism, it was, in Jefferson's view, rather backward. The combination of Liverpool being both ahead of the curve in terms of the playing of this music as well as considerably behind it when it came to the facilities to produce it professionally add to the feelings of marginalisation that a number of the interviewees raised.

Nationally, the manner in which Liverpool was made distinct from London was no less clear. The city was certainly depicted in a manner implying considerable difference to London and, in addition, the acts themselves often helped to perpetuate these differences when quizzed on their opinions of London. The tone of these interviews varied hugely, but most are undertaken in a jovial manner in the style that one would expect of a pop music publicity interview. Gerry Marsden, in a piece not untypical of the time, suggested that, "you know, we always thought London was a little village outside Liverpool."<sup>238</sup> Marsden touched on the above issue of Liverpool's paucity of resources compared to London in another interview, too:

Liverpool audiences gave us our start and that's one of the reasons why we love that city. It's true when we say that we don't have any intention of moving down to London because we've been exceptionally lucky with our first three discs and public appearances. We do think that Liverpool should have a recording studio right here in the city. Do you realise that Liverpool has more beat groups than any other city in Britain?<sup>239</sup>

Gerry Marsden was almost certainly the most outspoken on this issue. In the same publication, he would refer to a feeling of being ignored, as explained above, "I think it only took for the Beatles to get people interested. Since then, a lot of folk in London have realised that there's talent in Merseyside if only they'll go looking for it. It's not hard to find, either".<sup>240</sup> The final example of this from Marsden fits into another aspect of perceived London characteristics by those being interviewed. Marsden had, by the end of 1964, still not changed his mind, "London: a province of Liverpool! Not a bad place, but I wouldn't live there. The people seem colder than the Northerners".<sup>241</sup> London was

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<sup>237</sup> Oral testimony from Mal Jefferson, recorded by the author, 12 July 2017.

<sup>238</sup> *New Musical Express*, 5 April 1963.

<sup>239</sup> *Hit Parade*, June 1963.

<sup>240</sup> *Hit Parade*, May 1963.

<sup>241</sup> *New Record Mirror*, 19 December 1964.

often described by those being interviewed, or others, in terms that played up the supposed 'coldness' or cynicism of its inhabitants. John McNally of the Searchers suggested that, "I want to settle down just outside of Liverpool. Liverpool's the place for me and what I don't like about London is the show business scene. Everyone's out for all they can get. It's not for me".<sup>242</sup> These references to London's aloofness, or coldness, were also, unsurprisingly, present in *Mersey Beat*, this time in a profile of Adam Faith, "London's audiences are usually noted for the cold reception they give to visiting artists, but when this great performer did a show here they gave him a wild, Liverpool-type reception".<sup>243</sup> Londoners were therefore defined, in opposition to Liverpudlians, as being cynical, selfish, only out for themselves and emotionally cold. Liverpool's wildness, lack of respect for established social norms, and excitable nature set them apart from London. There are also examples of national newspapers seemingly criticising Londoners themselves for their perceived attitude towards Liverpool. A piece in *Melody Maker* in 1963 suggested that only the lack of musical facilities was holding Liverpool back from being Britain's Nashville, but framed this suggestion by emphasising apartness between London and Liverpool: "on Merseyside exists an R&B scene that could only find its counterpart in the USA. 'Liverpool, the Nashville of the North' someone sneeringly said in London, 'you're joking'".<sup>244</sup>

The Liverpool-London relationship is something that is very clearly identifiable in both the newspaper archives and in the oral histories. It is, however, important to stress that it never manifests itself in any clearly articulated reasoning or rationalisation, instead falling back on the kind of mentality that has often been prevalent in this kind of scenario – a feeling of being ignored, or marginalised, or exploited. It was extremely unlikely that any definitive answer would have been found to clearly explain what it was that created this hostility. Insofar as London is the capital of England, and Liverpool was defined as apart from that capital, the evidence is relatively convincing. However, the case for exceptionalism in this regard is not quite as clear cut. First, the oral history evidence provides some clarification that this was a feeling that was not uniformly shared amongst every participant in the period. Second, it is never made clear the extent to which Liverpool is privileged against other cities in

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<sup>242</sup> *New Record Mirror*, 8 February 1964.

<sup>243</sup> *Mersey Beat*, 1-15 November 1962.

<sup>244</sup> *Melody Maker*, 23 March 1963.

its relationship with London. That this was a period where Liverpool played a hugely significant role within the cultural atmosphere of 1960s Britain inevitably led to far more being written about Liverpool than anywhere else. This must be considered. Finally, that the attitudes to and from Liverpool, whatever they were, could simply be subsumed within a much wider milieu. For example, it is conceivable that the city's supposed hostility towards London could be better situated within a wider discussion about working class attitudes towards metropolitan centres. Building on this, whether it would be possible to situate Liverpool in a wider 'North-South divide' concept. It is extremely unlikely that residents of Liverpool are alone amongst the provincial British or English cities in holding negative views of London. What must be kept in mind is the extent to which this Liverpool-London paradigm was simply a result of looking closely at one city in particular, in a period where a media was reacting to a phenomenon that had not been seen before and was keen to provide it with a narrative.

*The North-South Divide, Merseybeat, and the Liverpool Sound.*

Liverpool was (and is) by no means the only northern city, town, or indeed any conurbation that felt marginalised within the wider national identity of England, or Britain. The very nature of identities is that they tend to pile one on top of another and need not be exclusive of each other – they may exist simultaneously, at different strengths and at different times. Associated with this are attempts at characterisation of what was known as the 'Liverpool Sound' – the idea that there was a distinct sound that Liverpool created in this period. The reality was somewhat different. Extraneous events, associated with said 'sound', that contributed to the Liverpool phenomenon but do not fall within simple categorisation must also be considered.

The nature of the Mersey Beat movement was that it was genuinely unique in that no single city, aside from London, had taken such a grip on the communal popular psyche of Britain up to that point. However, the extent to which this was represented as a uniquely Liverpool phenomenon is relatively inconsistent. On many occasions, the movement was described as a 'northern' one and, of course, the fact that the emergence of groups from other parts of the country does something to undermine the extent to which Liverpool was truly exceptional in this sphere.

The North-South divide is a concept that enjoyed little academic examination until the 1980s and 1990s when, as aforementioned, questions began to be asked over

exactly what ideas such as ‘Englishness’ meant. Much of the writing was inspired by the policies of the Thatcher government and the emerging debate of national identity within the United Kingdom that led to the establishment of devolution for Wales and Scotland in the late 1990s. Amongst that literature were some compelling works. Helen Jewell, as shown in the Literature Review, plotted the divide as one that had much longer roots than sometimes imagined.<sup>245</sup> Whilst in common parlance a divide would be described as relating to a relatively poorer, post-industrial north compared to a wealthier, more successful south, Jewell describes, going back as far as the 13<sup>th</sup> century, how the divide changed over time, including the period where greater growth was enjoyed in the north as a consequence of said industrial revolution.

Within this context, it is necessary to examine the extent to which this was a truly Liverpool phenomenon, rather than a wider, more generally northern one. Some, such as Dave Haslam, have argued that this period in British music was far more of a moment for areas outside of London and the south (and this does not necessarily just mean the north), rather than being exceptional to Liverpool: “the rise of the Beatles provided a role model for hundreds of groups, whether from Liverpool or not...from the Beatles onwards, it’s been the cities outside London which have nurtured to major forces in British pop”.<sup>246</sup> It must be remembered, however, that the Liverpool beat phenomenon was exceptionally short-lived in terms of national prominence, and that there is evidence of the phenomenon itself being described as one that applied to the entire north, rather than just Liverpool.

The newspaper coverage was sometimes keen to portray the phenomenon as a wider northern movement, rather than one that just emanated from Liverpool. Surprisingly, *Mersey Beat* was one of the publications that did this. In a piece entitled “LONDON, YOU’VE IGNORED THE NORTH FOR LONG ENOUGH”, an editorial laid out the accusations that, “why is it that national music publications ignore the north? In fact, ‘national’ seems to stand for ‘London’ – and the rest of Britain is treated in a minor fashion – shrugged off with small columns on ‘Around the Provinces’ and ‘Up North’. We’ve no doubt they realise that the rest of Britain is vastly larger than London, but it seems that an entertainer must make records before he receives adequate publicity within their pages...Liverpool is the Rocking City...Manchester is alive, alert. She seems

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<sup>245</sup> Jewell, *North-South Divide*.

<sup>246</sup> Haslam, *Manchester, England*, p. 92.



to be saying 'London you've had it easy for far too long – the North is awakening...Northern TV should give a better deal to Northern entertainment. Granada has virtually ignored Northern talent, because Northern people don't have a voice'.<sup>247</sup> The framing of this editorial put the north at its centre, rather than Liverpool in particular. The praise of Manchester is noteworthy, too, for it does not hint at an intra-northern rivalry that has become part of the common parlance of discussion of the two cities.

The national press also showed occasional signs of assimilating Liverpool within a far wider northern whole. For example, the *New Record Mirror* would sometimes describe the phenomenon, and the groups within it, as being part of an amorphous North. On Gerry and the Pacemakers, it said, "for the group, which has been on the beat scene for years now, the Northern beat scene, in fact, where the much-heralded Beatles sprung from a few months ago".<sup>248</sup> On Billy Fury, the same paper suggested that much of his charm would be lost if he, "ironed out his northern accent and learned to speak BBC English, he just wouldn't be Billy Fury any more. What's the point of that?".<sup>249</sup> The notable aspect of these two pieces is not to suggest that this was done in a negative manner, indeed in the second quotation relating to Billy Fury, his northernness is held up as a positive, in the face of homogeneous BBC English. Nevertheless, the way in which the two acts were presented as simply, 'northern' is instructive of an attitude that has been suggested to exist by prominent historians of the period. Writing in 1966, for example, Asa Briggs opined on the differences contained within the north itself, "the concept of a homogeneous North, so dear to so many of the participants in the recent popular debate about North and South, is a dangerous oversimplification. The variety of the North requires at least as much explanation – historical and otherwise – as the difference between North and South".<sup>250</sup> There were other examples of this in action, sometimes from members of the public writing in to these publications to complain about the lack of representation for southern groups, "to be successful, it seems you have to come from the North. Great southern groups...can't get a hit in edgeways

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<sup>247</sup> *Mersey Beat*, 31 January – 14 February 1963.

<sup>248</sup> *New Record Mirror*, 16 March 1963.

<sup>249</sup> *New Record Mirror*, 6 April 1963.

<sup>250</sup> A. Briggs, 'Issues in Northern History', *Northern History*, 1, 1966 p. 3.

because of the record-buying public thinking that the ‘new sound’ is confined to the Northern groups only”.<sup>251</sup>

The above examples are, however, not representative of the majority of coverage. Difference was often found in the words used by the newspapers. For example, the aforementioned *New Record Mirror* carried an interview with Bob Wooller in one of its articles in which he stated that, “I was interviewed and asked why there were so many Northern groups in the charts. I corrected the interviewer by saying they were, technically, Northern groups but in reality, all from Lancashire. I replied, ‘in Sheffield, Doncaster, Barnsley and Leeds there is far more talent than in the whole of Lancashire...but the top and bottom of it is that no-one seems to give Yorkshire a thought. A&R men are invading Lancashire’”.<sup>252</sup>

Difference was also found in other ways. Any attempts to provoke divisions between northern groups were quickly shot down by the groups themselves. Some newspapers, such as *Melody Maker*, attempted to promote the idea of a clash between cities (particularly Liverpool and Manchester) which, in successive weeks claimed that that “the battle of the North has begun – with Manchester squaring up to Liverpool in the pop struggle”<sup>253</sup> and “forty miles from Liverpool, a beat battlefront is forming, with guitars instead of guns. Target? Britain’s Pop 50 and Liverpool’s powerful reputation as the North’s beatiest city. The question everyone in the beat business seems to be asking is can Manchester equal Liverpool’s success and become Britain’s second Beatsville?”<sup>254</sup> This type of rhetoric both promoted the idea of Liverpool’s uniqueness and attempted to frame it within a wider northern narrative. This other northern city, Manchester, was suggested as a challenge to Liverpool’s supremacy. The issue, however, was that this idea was very often quickly dismissed by those in the groups. Freddie Garritty, of Freddie and the Dreamers, a Manchester group, tackled the supposed Liverpool-Manchester music war head-on by suggesting that, “people often ask me for my views on the Liverpool [sic]-Manchester chart battle. Let’s face it – Liverpool has won! You might say that it always seems to be three to one...seriously, of course, there’s no such thing as a ‘war’ between Liverpool and Manchester. We all dig each other’s music like

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<sup>251</sup> *Melody Maker*, 29 June 1963.

<sup>252</sup> *New Record Mirror*, 10 August 1963.

<sup>253</sup> *Melody Maker*, 25 May 1963.

<sup>254</sup> *Melody Maker*, 1 June 1963.

mad, and we're happy to be part of the Northern beat scene".<sup>255</sup> In addition, any attempts to play up a north-south divide between the groups themselves was often similarly shut down. For example, when talking about how the Lennon and McCartney gave them one of their own compositions to record, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones explicitly rejected any idea of a north-south rivalry, "quite honestly, we didn't think that they would be prepared to give us one of their best numbers seeing as they are the leaders of the Northern Beat Brigade while we are definitely Londoners. But surprisingly they were very happy about us re-recording *I Wanna Be Your Man*', [said Jagger]. 'It just goes to show', interrupted Keith, 'that there isn't as much enmity between the Northern and Southern groups as some people make out. Most of the arguments are made bigger than they really are by the press'.<sup>256</sup> These two examples raise the issue of the extent to which these ideas were created by the press in the search for an appealing narrative to sell.

This is certainly a concept that David Boyce agreed with. In an interview for this research he suggested that, "I don't remember people banging on about being Liverpudlians as much in the 60s as they did later on. I don't think it was in the Beatles' early publicity. It was acknowledged that they were from 'the North' and the word 'Liverpool' was mentioned. But it wasn't turned into a big thing until, you know, a few of the other bands became successful and the only reason why they became successful was because they were being managed by Brian Epstein. And then it became an easy genre title".<sup>257</sup>

The idea of a North-South divide was, therefore, not as prominent as the Liverpool-London paradigm discussed earlier. There were certainly occasions where the movement was offhandedly explained as a 'northern' one, rather than being specifically Liverpool, but these occasions were relatively few and far between. Boyce's testimony, too, is the only real example of such thinking from the interviewees spoken to for this research. There were criticisms about what the Merseybeat phenomenon consisted of, and its authenticity once a considerable decampment to London was undertaken, but with regard to it being a much larger 'northern' movement, the evidence is relatively scant. Crucially, 'northernness' was not used as a method of denigrating Liverpool,

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<sup>255</sup> *Hit Parade*, October 1963.

<sup>256</sup> *Beat Instrumental*, December 1963.

<sup>257</sup> Oral testimony from David Boyce, recorded by the author, 27 January 2016.

rather it was used in semi-synonymous terms in a 'catch-all' manner. Liverpool was, by and large, presented as being fairly unique within this movement and it was certainly its epicentre. This continued into discussion of precisely what the Liverpool Sound was.

Attempts to define the Liverpool Sound, that is, the genre and style of music that emanated from Liverpool in the 1960s, took up a considerable amount of energy in this period. These attempts at definition cut to the heart of the difficulties in trying to apply essentialist principles to distinct peoples. The discussion surrounding the existence of a Liverpool Sound, whatever it may have been, tend to lead to the best examples of discussion surrounding exceptionalist thinking on Liverpool when it comes to this period. Said discussion is hugely divided, with different people prioritising different aspects of the alleged 'sound' dependent on what mattered most to them. In addition to this, rather than thinking in terms of a wholesale 'sound' that goes some way towards homogenising an entire city, alternative explanations may be required. The question of the Liverpool Sound goes to the heart of the exceptionalism of the period under study – if there was no real attempt to try and define the sound as being different, then this specific geographic and cultural exceptionalism would fall apart.

*Mersey Beat*, unsurprisingly, was keen to play up the idea of a distinct, unique sound associated with the Liverpool acts. One way it did this was via association with America, "the Liverpool Sound owes much to the influence of American artists such as Chuck Berry, The Miracles, etc. It also finds its roots with the early American rockers such as Jerry Lee Lewis, Little Richard and Gene Vincent. Liverpool, it seems, is a few years behind the advancement of US music, but also a few years ahead of British best".<sup>258</sup> Thus the explanation of the Liverpool Sound puts it in an advantageous, and unique, position when compared to the rest of the country. On the existence of a 'Liverpool Sound', *Mersey Beat* also offered clear examples of Liverpool's apparent uniqueness. One letter to the publication suggested that, "Liverpool earns the title The Rocking City because there are definitely more groups than in any other city in the British Isles. Leading A&R men from London all agree that the standard of the Merseyside groups is the highest in the country. There is also a distinct 'Liverpool Sound' and no other city has developed such originality."<sup>259</sup> Precisely what this sound is, is left undefined. Finally, a discussion on "Is There a Liverpool Sound" consisted of contributions from

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<sup>258</sup> *Mersey Beat*, 24 October – 7 November 1963.

<sup>259</sup> *Mersey Beat*, 25 April – 9 May 1963.

Kim Batty, “there is no doubt that there is. It is Mersey Beat! Having recently arrived from down south I am able to make the comparison. The sound here is more solid, it’s got atmosphere in it” and Bert Cook, “it’s a different sound from anything I’ve heard on radio or TV or in any of the many ballrooms outside Liverpool where I’ve been. The sound haunts you and stops in your head. It’s infectious and makes you want to listen again. The sound is different from anything else”.<sup>260</sup> Here again is the idea that the Liverpool Sound definitely exists, but what it is left undefined. What is clear, however, the manner in which Liverpool was defined as being apart. The city was described in terms that set it ahead of the rest of the British musical scene.

The national newspapers provided a more nuanced picture. With regard to the existence of a Liverpool Sound, there were relatively few ways in which it was acknowledged to exist, yet alone explained. The vast majority of the coverage actually emphasised the difference between the groups involved, and played down the idea that there was any singular sound that tied the Liverpool groups together. This is not to say that there were no examples of its existence. Chris Curtis of the Searchers, when asked about whether he thought there was a Liverpool Sound, was insistent that there was, “no doubt about it: Liverpool sound, or noise as some prefer to call it, does belong to the area. There is nothing quite like it anywhere else. There are lots of theories about how the Mersey Beat developed but ours is quite simple. It was the teenagers of Merseyside who were really responsible for it”.<sup>261</sup> An actual explanation as to what the sound specifically consisted was, however, unforthcoming. One of the only examples of an attempt to define what the Liverpool Sound came via a fan letter to DISC magazine in which it was claimed that, “of course there is such a thing as the Liverpool Sound. The groups from this area accent their rhythm differently on the bass guitar and the bass drum producing an infectious and exciting beat only a nutcase could resist”.<sup>262</sup> A feature on the Cavern Club in the same newspaper emphasised the live experience of the music being played in the Cavern as the ‘true’ Liverpool Sound, “but what IS the Liverpool Sound? For myself, as I found out, among the deep-rooted aisles of the Cavern. Listening to the raucous, earthy beat of the Merseybeats, playing sheer rock ‘n’ roll. I discovered that their music is basic. Through the underground atmosphere of the Cavern and other

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<sup>260</sup> *Mersey Beat*, 9-23 May 1963.

<sup>261</sup> *New Musical Express*, 9 August 1963.

<sup>262</sup> *DISC*, 3 August 1963.

Liverpool cellar clubs, this sound becomes amplified into an aggressive, powerful music.”<sup>263</sup>

What the national newspapers tended to report, above all, were debates about the extent to which a distinctive Liverpool Sound existed. The pattern here, however, was that interviewees for the newspaper would invariably claim that their own particular sound had very little to do with one that was applied to Liverpool as a whole. The objections usually came in one of two ways; first, the suggestion that the sheer number of groups coming of the city made any idea of a unifying sound unrealistic and second, that in reality there was a sound that came from the Beatles, and then there was everything else. On the first, some acts were insistent that they had very little to do with Liverpool, “the Undertakers do not wish to be associated with Liverpool. Not that they don’t like the place, but they believe that everyone has been trying to get on the bandwagon just by saying they’ve got the Liverpool sound. ‘Well we haven’t got the Liverpool sound’ said Chris Huston, the lead guitarist. ‘We’ve got our own sound – and we intend to keep it’”.<sup>264</sup> The Searchers, as a group, also played down attempts to define their group as part of a much larger musical movement, “the Searchers claim that if there is any similarity between their sound and that of other Liverpool groups, it is purely accidental. Says Tony Jackson, the group’s bass guitarist and lead singer, ‘that is the thing we have always aimed for – originality. We believe that the biggest handicap for any group is sounding like another group. If we have anything in common with the other Merseyside outfits, it is simply that we have come from the same area and have the same accents’”.<sup>265</sup> Gerry Marsden, of Gerry and the Pacemakers, added a further wrinkle to this question by claiming that, “to be honest, there is no Merseyside sound at all, because most groups are different. Take the Beatles, ourselves and Billy J Kramer – they are all distinctive, different sounds. It’s not a Merseyside sound, just a sound.”<sup>266</sup> Marsden was similarly scathing later, in 1964, calling it, “a complete fallacy. How can you possibly lump the Beatles, the Searchers and Billy J Kramer together and claim that they have the same sound? The fact is that each has a completely individual and distinctive approach – and that’s the reason for their success”.<sup>267</sup> Finally, a letter from a

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<sup>263</sup> *DISC*, 17 August 1963.

<sup>264</sup> *New Record Mirror*, 8 June 1963.

<sup>265</sup> *Hit Parade*, September 1963.

<sup>266</sup> *Melody Maker*, 29 June 1963.

<sup>267</sup> *New Musical Express*, March 1964.

Peter Ledson of Liverpool to *Melody Maker* played up this idea of difference, “why must we continually hear about the ‘Liverpool Sound’. This does not, never has, nor never will exist! Take the Beatles and the Pacemakers as an example. The actual instrumentation varies as well as the vocal styles. So stop talking about all Liverpool groups in the same breath. They deserve to be recognised in their own rights – not just as another product of Liverpool”.<sup>268</sup> These are a few examples of a trend that permeated much of the writing at this time. There was an insistence on using phrases like, ‘Liverpool Sound’, or ‘Mersey Sound’ to provide a clear way of describing the movement. There were, however, a noticeable lack of attempts to provide something that unified all of these groups in the music they played, beyond that of simple geography.

The oral history evidence on the existence and/or definition of a Liverpool Sound was more promising. The first aspect to consider here are the hitherto unconsidered temporal constraints of what some of the interviewees thought the Liverpool Sound was. Mal Jefferson, for example, explicitly claimed that “the Liverpool Sound is basically the Beatles in ‘62”.<sup>269</sup> This places the Liverpool Sound, as he understood it, at a different time and place to the music that became nationally popular. The Beatles had their first chart hit, *Love Me Do*, in October 1962 so this clearly puts his understanding of the Liverpool Sound at a time before the explosion of Liverpool groups on to the national scene. Kingsize Taylor, too, was dismissive of the music from Liverpool that became nationally popular in the early 1960s. Taylor suggested that the Liverpool Sound, as it existed in Liverpool and with reference to the music that became a national phenomenon as “a pseudo-Liverpool Sound”, was “unique because it carries a heavy sound with little instruments...it was 8/4 time...this gives you a bigger sound, more power and more feeling as far as I’m concerned. It drives everything and the emphasis on the next note always drives Liverpool music”.<sup>270</sup> These two testimonies should be treated with care and are not representative of the sample as a whole. The fact that both Taylor and Jefferson were participants in the movement from its earliest days may have provoked a defensiveness over what the Liverpool Sound was. That there is one of the few attempts to actually define it in musical terms, however, certainly counts in Taylor’s favour.

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<sup>268</sup> *Melody Maker*, 29 June 1963.

<sup>269</sup> Oral testimony from Mal Jefferson, recorded by the author, 12 July 2017.

<sup>270</sup> Oral testimony from Ted ‘Kingsize’ Taylor, recorded by the author, 10 January 2017.

Others, such as Brian Jones, were far more simplistic in their analysis. For him, “the Liverpool Sound is two guitars, bass and drums”. For others, such as David Boyce, the Liverpool Sound was as much about the performative aspect of playing music, rather than the content of the records that sold well nationally, “it was a particular relationship between the drums and the bass. Particularly in the Cavern because the acoustic was very particular...the way in which the stage was constructed at the end of the tunnel – the drummer was a slightly higher level than the guitarists...the bass player and the drummer would play the same kind of pattern...put the bass speaker behind the bass drum and the bass guitar plays through the bass drum. It was literally visceral because you were on a level with this sound”.<sup>271</sup> Chris Huston, who was interviewed in the 1960s, as shown above, and dismissed the idea of a Liverpool Sound, was far more forthcoming in an interview for this project. He suggested that, “we stamped our feet, we kicked holes in the stage for excitement. The music was primeval. What we lacked in sophistication we had in feel. We didn’t even know what we were doing”. In this framework, Huston was happy to place himself and his group within the wider Liverpool Sound phenomenon. He was, however, clear in not trying to define it in musical terms, but by presenting his outlook at that time as one of a fairly naïve young man, but one with huge enthusiasm and energy. He was, therefore, far more willing to consider the existence of a Liverpool Sound in the retrospective interview than he was when he was being interviewed for a music newspaper at the time.

The second common method of defining difference in this manner was by setting the Beatles apart from the rest. The recording manager of the Beatles, George Martin, was particularly insistent that the unique talents and abilities of the Beatles should not be mixed up with the rest of the Liverpool groups, “I prefer to talk of a Beatles sound, rather than a Liverpool sound, after all they got the whole thing started. Mind you, I’m not suggesting that the other groups copy the Beatles. Quite the contrary, for their styles are totally different. That’s why I say you can’t lump them all together under the heading of a ‘Liverpool Sound’. I admit there’s an affinity between them, [like the] musical relationship between Lonnie Donegan and the Vipers in the heyday of skiffle, but there the similarity ends”.<sup>272</sup> In this way, the Beatles were held up as being the truly unique aspect of the Liverpool movement at this time. In an interview in DISC in 1963,

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<sup>271</sup> Oral testimony from David Boyce, recorded by the author, 27 January 2016.

<sup>272</sup> *New Musical Express*, 7 June 1963.



Cliff Richard had similar things to say, “I definitely like what I hear from the Liverpool groups, but please don’t tell me that they all sound like the Beatles. If any one group has a distinctive sound, it is the Beatles. Firstly, because they write their own material, secondly because they are really a vocal group”.<sup>273</sup> Ray Ennis, of the Swinging Blue Jeans, suggested that much of the focus of the Liverpool Sound should be reserved for the Beatles, “Liverpool, Leicester, London, they’re all the same. There is no Liverpool Sound any more...just because the Beatles happen to come from Liverpool and started the whole thing off, suddenly we find every other group from the same place is given a tag”.<sup>274</sup> In this formulation, the exceptionalism lies with the Beatles and Liverpool is given no special treatment. Indeed, when the ‘sound’ label was applied to groups from elsewhere, it was met with similar reactions. A group called The Paramounts, for example, took exception to being labelled with the term, ‘Southend Sound’, “talking about sounds, people say that because we come from Southend we have the ‘Southend Sound’. Rubbish! There’s no such thing as the Liverpool Sound, let alone a Southend Sound! Every group has its own individual sound”.<sup>275</sup> The attempts to define different places as each having their own sound, and the according backlash, adds to the feeling that the ‘Liverpool Sound’ was not a term that was based on anything tangible or definable.

The oral history evidence provides a mixed picture. David Boyce, for example, was extremely sceptical about any wider influence that Liverpool had on the movement and that it was, for him, entirely about the Beatles, “the thing was that it happened very, very fast. And it was really about the Beatles. Everything else rode on the back of the Beatles. This ‘exceptionalism’ thing of Liverpool – as far as the music thing is concerned – I think that it could have happened anywhere. I think that there was something exceptional about the Beatles, but I don’t think that they were exceptional because they came from Liverpool”.<sup>276</sup> Frankie Connor made the point that once Brian Epstein moved his stable of acts down to London, including the Beatles, then the creative impetus that drove Liverpool at this time faded away. Once that group went, it was, according to him, “very much second division compared to Epstein’s [group of acts]. Couldn’t repeat the

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<sup>273</sup> *DISC*, 6 July 1963.

<sup>274</sup> *DISC*, 25 January 1964.

<sup>275</sup> *New Record Mirror*, 8 February 1964.

<sup>276</sup> Oral testimony from David Boyce, recorded by the author, 27 January 2016.

success of the Beatles. Lightening doesn't strike twice in that regard."<sup>277</sup> The Beatles, in these formulations, underpinned the Mersey Beat movement to a considerable extent.

Others, such as Kingsize Taylor, placed a clear split in the concept of the Liverpool Sound that emerged once the Beatles gained national success. As shown above, Taylor is reluctant to consider the music that became nationally popular to be *the Liverpool Sound*, but he placed the Beatles at the centre of it, in any case. The importance of the Beatles to the movement as a whole is shown in Taylor's frustration that what he saw from them before they became nationally popular was not what they would later become. He claimed that, "the minute you suited and booted them and gave them a good scrubbing down, they were no longer the Beatles – that wasn't the Beatles per se, you were watching the world's first boy band...what the Beatles became is not the Beatles".<sup>278</sup> Taylor suggests there that the Beatles were vitally important to the national popularity of the Liverpool Sound but, again, splits the phenomenon quite clearly into two phases. The questions of authenticity here are interesting because he was adamant about the importance of the Beatles to both phases, yet, what the Beatles became afterwards, whilst fundamental to that national movement was, in his mind, a betrayal of what they originally were. This argument places the Beatles at the core of the movement that became nationally popular even if, in Taylor's mind, it was not the 'actual' Liverpool Sound.

Paul du Noyer placed huge emphasis on the role of the Beatles: "[Mersey Beat] was over so quickly because of its inherent musical limitations that could only withstand immense popularity for a limited amount of time. One thing which kept it going was the huge success of the Beatles and the Beatles themselves were the engine...the original compositions of Lennon and McCartney were the truly miraculous ingredients in the whole mix and one that you can never explain away through history or sociology or whatever – sometimes something extraordinary happens, like Lennon meeting McCartney was one of those almost magical occurrences."<sup>279</sup> Du Noyer raises perhaps the most important point in this discussion – about whether there should be a limit to thinking about instances like the Mersey Beat phenomenon within the framework of something clearly definable and explainable.

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<sup>277</sup> Oral testimony from Frankie Connor, recorded by the author, 4 October 2015.

<sup>278</sup> Oral testimony from Ted 'Kingsize' Taylor, recorded by the author, 10 January 2017.

<sup>279</sup> Oral testimony from Paul du Noyer, recorded by the author, 18 February 2016.

The 'Liverpool Sound', therefore, was not something that was easy to clearly identify and describe. It seemed to be used as a simple way to describe music from Liverpool groups and yet almost every Liverpool group seemed to go out of their way to say that they did not subscribe to it. As a method of pointing out Liverpool's difference, the Liverpool Sound was probably not intended to be used in a negative manner. Rather the phenomenon itself should not be lost sight of. It was unprecedented for one particular city (outside London) to dominate popular music in this manner and the need for the press to give it a name, or explanation, or reason is one of the key themes of this thesis. Notable within this work, too, is that the newspapers themselves often leave the question open. Few attempted to actually define what the sound is, leaving it to the groups to attempt their own definitions or, as was more often the case, describe how they were so far detached from it that they could not possibly be considered adherents.

This peculiarity both increased the idea of Liverpool's purported exceptionalism and reduced it. In terms of the presentation of Liverpool as a unique place, the Liverpool Sound coverage is fairly straightforward. That being said, the lack of any clear definition, the regularity with which groups disassociated with it, and the way in which the sounds of other places were promoted, suggests that the Liverpool Sound was primarily an attractive journalistic device. With this in mind, however, it is hard to disagree with Sara Cohen's contribution on the issue that, although it may well have been a press construction to some extent, "the label is at the same time contested and debated and used by many within Liverpool itself, to construct a sense of difference and distinctiveness, a sense of Liverpool-ness",<sup>280</sup> however difficult to accurately define that may be.

### *Liverpool, London, and the North-South Divide: Conclusions*

Within the Merseybeat period there certainly existed some sort of Liverpool-London/North-South divide. It was undoubtedly a fruitful way of creating, or exploiting, a cultural and social narrative in pursuit of, particularly for the music press, a convincing story to write about in their newspapers. The promotion of some sort of division between Liverpool and London clearly helped create feedback from the readers of said newspapers – the degree to which this can be held up as a definitive example of

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<sup>280</sup> S. Cohen, 'Identity, Place, and the Liverpool Sound' in Stokes, *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music*, p. 133.

Liverpool's supposed exceptionalism is much harder to gauge. The North-South divide, as shown, was not a particularly strong pull in the newspaper coverage and much of the oral history testimony promoted the Liverpool-London relationship in far stronger terms. Dave Russell's contention that the clash between different regional cultures in this period was not so much North-South based<sup>281</sup> is therefore supported by the evidence collated for this research. Aside from the occasional reference to some sort of homogeneous 'North', the focus for the media was almost always Liverpool. This should be relatively unsurprising – despite the existence of some groups from other northern cities, the beat phenomenon of the 1960s was dominated by Liverpool acts. To have subsumed them within a broader 'northern' narrative would have been an odd journalistic choice. This kind of journalism was in evidence in the 1980s where the 'North-South divide' became an issue-du-jour in the press and narratives concerning economic, social, and cultural divisions between North and South were extremely prominent.<sup>282</sup> In the period under consideration here, though there is evidence in places of North-South methodologies being employed, they were by no means the one relied upon most.

The Liverpool-London narrative presented by the music press did exist to some extent and can be backed up with some of the oral history evidence collected for this research. Unlike the North-South divide, this provided much more mileage. Shields' reliance on 'marginality' providing a key facet of an identity divide between North and South is more applicable to the Liverpool-London dichotomy than it is to the North-South one. The London-centric media industry, whether perceived or real, certainly occupied a space within the popular imagination of Liverpudlians that contributed to their own feelings of marginalisation. Crucially, this was mostly not done by Liverpudlians imagining themselves as part of a broader 'North', but as *Liverpudlians*. The dominance of London in this period echoes some of the themes outlined in other places. The economic pull of London, harming Liverpool, was a matter of social and economic importance in Victorian times where "there were a number of schemes for reconfiguration of Liverpool and Merseyside...to counterbalance the dominance of London and the south-east".<sup>283</sup> As part of a longer pattern of Liverpool-London rivalry,

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<sup>281</sup> Russell, *Looking North*, p. 225.

<sup>282</sup> See Shields, *Places on the Margin*, pp. 231-245 for examples.

<sup>283</sup> J. Belchem, 'Celebrating Liverpool' in Belchem (ed), *Liverpool 800*, p. 23.

culminating in this period with the Beatles' departure from Liverpool to London in 1964, the relationship between the two cities, and representations of them thereof, provides the best example of articulating the 'apartness' that is a crucial ingredient in Liverpool's supposed exceptionalism.

## **Section 2: Class and Gender Paradigms**

Liverpool is far from alone in being a northern working-class city. That being said, at certain points in time, it has been Liverpool's particular predilection for behaviours most associated with the working-classes in the right-thinking metropolitan press that has attracted the most scorn. Referring back to the 1980s again, the 'un-English' method of explaining the Heysel, Hillsborough, Militant, Toxteth, Bulger sequence of events were not done through thinking about the city's status as a port, or its American influence, but due to its status as 'Britain's Beirut' – it was rooted heavily in class paradigms. Thinking about Liverpool's place within Britain in terms of class might prove more helpful when it comes to thinking about how exceptional Liverpool actually is. Per Frost, the identity of the Scouser as one that has been described as white and working-class. The extent to which it was white in this period will be discussed in the chapter to come, but the manner in which working-class descriptors were used, even at a time where the city was heavily featured in the media for positive reasons, will be the focus of this section. Finally, this section will also examine the lack of place for women within the Merseybeat phenomenon.

### *Liverpool as a place of deprivation and violence*

Liverpool was undoubtedly painted as a place that had a population with a significant number of unskilled workers, or unemployed. In 1960s Liverpool, for example, the number of people who fell into social grade D/E numbered 38%,<sup>284</sup> compared to the national average of 29%.<sup>285</sup> A similar northern conurbation, such as Manchester, aligned far more with the national average than Liverpool, too, with 30% D/E grade representation.<sup>286</sup> This fed through into popular depictions of the city, such as Daniel Farson's 1963 documentary for the BBC on the Merseybeat phenomenon. The

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<sup>284</sup> [http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10105821/cube/SOCIAL\\_GRADE](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10105821/cube/SOCIAL_GRADE) [Accessed 31/10/2019].

<sup>285</sup> [http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10090283/cube/SOCIAL\\_GRADE](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10090283/cube/SOCIAL_GRADE) [Accessed 31/10/2019].

<sup>286</sup> [http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10056925/cube/SOCIAL\\_GRADE](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10056925/cube/SOCIAL_GRADE) [Accessed 31/10/2019].

importance of the Farson documentary cannot be understated. It was often brought up unprovoked in the interviews, but the content was often left unremembered. Personal appearances (such as that by Faron Ruffley) were privileged over the actual content of what Farson was saying. In this way, it is entirely conceivable that this documentary affected the representation of the Merseybeat movement within popular culture. Throughout the piece, Farson leaves the viewer (presumably anyone in the rest of the country curious about Merseybeat) in no doubt about what kind of place Liverpool was. It is variously described as, “a place the Beatles came from and the place they left behind”<sup>287</sup> as if Liverpool were a place in which few would wish to remain. He carried on: “the place is Liverpool, to my mind the strangest of all the cities of the North. Not the nicest, for nice is hardly a word one can apply to Liverpool, but hard living, hard-drinking, hard-fighting, violent...”.<sup>288</sup> The picture here is perfectly clear and the image of Liverpool is one that is difficult to live in and violent – this account applies class metrics to the city from the outset. However, this is not necessarily framed as a bad thing: “...but friendly and fiercely alive. Indeed, if one had to sum up the so-called Liverpool Sound in one word, that sound that has swept south and become a musical sensation, that word would be vitality. Sheer staggering vitality. And this is characteristic of the whole background of Liverpool”.<sup>289</sup> Liverpool’s hard-drinking and violent nature is therefore spun to be thought of in terms of ‘vitality’. Liverpool is, on the one hand, described as a difficult place to live in, but the ferocity and determination of its people is held up as the crucible for creating a popular movement that swept Britain. The class status of the inhabitants of Liverpool is therefore put at the forefront of rationalisation for the Merseybeat phenomenon.

Finally, Farson narrated over footage of children playing in amongst run-down areas of the city: “today one gets the impression of a past and vanished splendour...the main streets have an urgent movement to them that reminds me of the main cities of Australia. The back streets are how I imagine London looked one hundred years ago. Drab, dirty, whose only colour lies in the people. If I was going to make a film on Jack the Ripper, this could be the setting. Because Liverpool was a town that grew up in a hurry and was virtually built in the last half of the last century, it has now grown old. There

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<sup>287</sup> *Beat City*, (1963), BBC Television.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*

are reputedly 80,000 slum dwellings and 30,000 unemployed. Poverty is another reason for the beat groups. Children have to make their own entertainment.”<sup>290</sup>

Liverpool is therefore referred to in terms of being well behind London economically, as well as being described as drab and dirty, but the most important slant comes in the final two sentences. Here, Liverpool’s beat groups are given a direct line of causation from the city’s poverty. The deprivation, it is argued, created an environment in which young people had little choice but to play instruments to keep themselves occupied.

Ray Ennis of the Swinging Blue Jeans provided an anecdote in the *New Record Mirror* of a time before the Liverpool groups became popular nationwide. It went as follows:

It was more than three years ago. Before the Beatles had strayed far from the Liverpool city limits. A pioneering sort of journey into territories where the fans were used to a much smoother sort of beat sound. And it brought troubles. Says Blue Jeans leader Ray Ennis, ‘seems the fans hadn’t heard much of Liverpool. It was supposed to be a tough sort of place and they obviously expected us to be loaded up with bicycle chains and knuckle-dusters. Honestly, we could feel the atmosphere. They didn’t really respond to our music, because it was wilder and more ferocious. And they were very dodgy about meeting us because they thought we’d start a punch-up or something’.<sup>291</sup>

There are aspects of this to be examined more closely. First, is the fairly common depiction of Liverpool as a place of violence. For Ennis, this was his belief that the audience he played to expected him and his group to attend with ‘bicycle chains and knuckle dusters’. Care should be taken here as this was not a reference from someone who believed that this could be the case, but Ennis’ own interpretation on events. It is plausible that this may have been ‘read into’ the situation by Ennis himself. Second, however, is something more enlightening. The suggestion that Liverpool music was ‘wilder and more ferocious’ as a consequence of the social and economic situation of the city is something that crops up in the oral history evidence, too. Ozzie Yue, for example, provided his own hint of exceptionalism by claiming that, “Liverpool bands used to play it differently. That was...there was a lot more punch and rawness to it really. I don’t understand whether that’s in the genes of Scousers or what, but yeah.”<sup>292</sup> Terms like, ‘wild’ or ‘raw’ abound in this evidence as ways of articulating the authenticity, or lack of professional polish that was prevalent within the Mersey Beat phenomenon.

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<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>291</sup> *New Record Mirror*, 4 January 1964.

<sup>292</sup> Oral testimony from Ozzie Yue, recorded by the author, 23 February 2016.

Tony Jackson of the Searchers articulated a very similar experience in an interview with the *New Musical Express* in 1964:

'I used to go to a pub in Liverpool with a couple of me mates' he said in his heavy Liverpool accent. 'I had all-leather gear and sideburns and I used to sing Elvis numbers. There were so many fights there that in the end the public had his music license taken away. Every time we went on stage, someone'd chuck something and fight would break out. Everyone would start punching and kicking everyone else.' The rough side of life played a major party in Tony's younger life...the comfort of their Knightsbridge flat is a direct contrast to the building sites of Liverpool, but the sudden transition from Elvis imitator to individual stylist hasn't changed Tony that much. 'I still see my old mates when I'm in Liverpool and we have a drink together. Things have changed now there aren't all the rough houses there were. People can go into a pub without having their heads smashed in with a bottle. I don't mind the way it is now, but I used to enjoy the Saturday night punch-ups!'.<sup>293</sup>

There is less focus, here, on the way in which the violence impacted performance, but the image conjured of what it was like to play the venues that these groups did is very clear. The inevitability of violence is, however, used to describe Jackson's younger life, but any extrapolation on this is not forthcoming. The image of Liverpool, again, is very clear and, in this account, far more descriptive on the way in which playing in a group and violence often intersected. Jackson, too, does not frame this in negative terms. For him, it was apparently something to be looked forward to with excitement. The comfort of one of the most affluent areas of London, Knightsbridge, is also used as a direct comparison with the nature of Liverpool. It seems, therefore, that in this account Liverpool is described as a place of real violence and that this clearly helps, amongst many other media depictions, to create an image of Liverpool within the minds of those reading the paper that had never been.

The class aspect is perhaps one of the clearest themes that comes through in the oral history evidence. The interviewees articulate, time and again, how the environments that they grew up in can be directly linked to their obsessions with playing music, however these were not all linked with deprivation and poverty. Frankie Connor implied that groups Liverpool had produced could be linked with the state of the city, "Liverpool's talent. Even now it goes on. Before us we mentioned Billy Fury, then the Beatles, then the Frankies [Frankie Goes to Hollywood], Echo and the Bunnymen. There's more too today. It churns them out. Comics by the bucketload. It's a

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<sup>293</sup> *New Musical Express*, 17 July 1964.



hard city to live in. It's a tough city, but you take the brickbats and you take the bouquets as well".<sup>294</sup> For Connor, therefore, the common linkage of Liverpool producing comics and the economic status of the city is made. The very clichéd phrase, "you have to have a sense of humour to live in Liverpool" is repeated, sometimes in slightly different terms, by almost all of the interviewees in this research, Chris Huston for example, "overall Scousers are very humorous, but you have to be to live there". Brian Jones too, "you have to have a wacky sense of humour to live round here. It was rough". The phrase itself has been attributed to a number of different Liverpudlian comedians, usually Ken Dodd, but encapsulates the attitudes that many of these people have, or had. Humour is linked with socio-economic deprivation and is a fundamental pillar of the Liverpudlian character.

Yet, there were examples, too, of interviewees distancing themselves from the perception that the Beat phenomenon could simply be explained by social class. Mal Jefferson played up his perception that his group was different, "we were unusual. We weren't like the majority of the groups which were, you know, rough. Don't know how else to describe it. Unmanageable a lot of them. They were doing it for a lark and a joke and didn't want to make a living out of it".<sup>295</sup> Even in this testimony, however, Jefferson still recognised that, in lieu of a better word, the vast majority of the other Liverpool groups were 'rough'. David Boyce explained how his own upbringing, successful businessman father, and attendance of a minor public school in the north west did not make him typical of the Liverpool groups, either.

#### *Skiffle, amateurism and the impact on Mersey Beat.*

The newspapers at the time construct a similar, class-based, thesis for explaining the Liverpool beat boom. Far from the outgoing, seafaring place described in various works on Liverpool, the city is described as being insular, not outgoing and that this contributed to the Mersey Beat phenomenon. The explanation of a tendency towards, 'home-brewed entertainment' could quite conceivably be inferred to be euphemistically referring to the same impulse described in the Farson documentary – that the poverty of young Liverpudlians makes the self-production of entertainment a key part of the social and cultural make-up of the city. This methodology is repeated in a number of

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<sup>294</sup> Oral testimony from Frankie Connor, recorded by the author, 4 October 2015.

<sup>295</sup> Oral testimony from Mal Jefferson, recorded by the author, 12 July 2017.

features in *The Sunday Times* that focus on Liverpool. For example, in a piece entitled “Mersey Sound Soothes Savages”, the emergence of Mersey Beat is held up as a reason why “the last big gang fight in Liverpool, when squadrons of teenagers fought it out in the streets with whatever weapons came to hand, was 18 months ago”.<sup>296</sup> Mersey Beat is, in this calculation, used as a placeholder for otherwise seemingly inevitable violence. Further on, in a wider piece of reportage on Liverpool as a whole, it is suggested in a comparison to the emergence of figures of note from the city that, “clearly Liverpool, as England’s third city, with a population of 740,000 is bound to produce a share of national figures. But this list indicates a flowering of talent and vitality which, in so old, grimy and comparatively poor a city, demands further explanation...traditional night life flowed into the present growth of the ‘straight’ club. But they preserved, because Liverpool is hard-up, the cheapness of the shebeens, and although many of these places are real night-clubs, entrance prices are a few shillings and bar prices stay around pub level. This low-cost structure has always forced Liverpool to rely on local entertainment talent, and the performing tradition allied to the example of the Beatle fortune, has produced a line-up of some 400 Merseyside beat groups at present”.<sup>297</sup> This piece attempted to explain why, in its view, so many prominent people in a number of different industries came from Liverpool. There is a degree of surprise that talent people could come from an ‘old, grimy and comparatively poor city’, but with regards to the music, causation is directly found in Liverpool’s working-class nature. It was supposedly Liverpool’s ‘low-cost’ structure that encouraged young people to pick up instruments and play. In lieu of the entertainment presumably on offer elsewhere, Liverpool was described as a place where the inhabitants themselves were forced to entertain each other, owing to the lack of entertainment from other places. Perhaps the key, unsaid aspect here is amateurism. The proliferation of venues with low barriers to entry for any group that wanted to play was shown as being key to the emergence of this phenomenon.

The representation of Liverpool in the music press is also very clear in how it depicts Liverpool and, importantly, the role it played in creating the music that came from the city. In a wider piece about how the Mersey Beat movement came about, *Mersey Beat* ran a suggestion from Mark Peters that, “I also feel that the unemployment

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<sup>296</sup> M. Hamlyn, ‘Mersey sound soothes savages’, *The Sunday Times* (23 February 1964).

<sup>297</sup> ‘The Age of the Scouse’, *The Sunday Times* (12 April 1964).

problem turned a lot of kids towards show business because it was the only way they could make money”.<sup>298</sup> On a national level, the story is much the same. In an interview with Johnny Hutchinson, of the Big Three, he suggested when describing their music that it was, “not exactly angry, but often fierce, uncompromising and semi-aggressive. For us, wild music has always been a kind of safety valve. We blow our tops when we get together, whether it is for a rehearsal, a stage appearance or a recording session.’ As children, all three members of the groups lived within a few hundred yards of each other, in one of Liverpool’s toughest areas. They insist that their hard-hitting brand of music owes much to this environment”.<sup>299</sup> This is about as far as the analysis at this time tends to go, but Liverpool’s tough environment is clearly held up as being a key contributory factor as to why so many groups came from the city. The class paradigm is in this way, therefore, crucial to the way in which Liverpool was represented in popular media. As aforementioned, amateurism seems to be one of the offshoots from this – that young Liverpudlians were unable to access proper training and that, as a result, the consequence was not to dampen the desire to play an instrument or be in a group, but rather to increase it by learning on the job alongside friends. The social aspect of this will be considered shortly. Chris Curtis, of the Searchers, made this amateurism argument to point to a degree of exceptionalism in Liverpool, “the other thing is that most of the musicians on Merseyside don’t know how to play their instruments by the book, that is. Instead they’ve developed unorthodox styles which would probably throw a music teacher into hysterics”.<sup>300</sup> That this discussion revolved around the extent to which there was a ‘Liverpool Sound’ underlines this feeling – that it was the determination of Liverpool’s amateurs that created this atmosphere and was one of the sparks of this phenomenon. That there was supposedly ‘nothing like it anywhere else’ is a very clear determination that Liverpool’s class status was a key factor, in Curtis’ mind, in contributing to the success of the groups in this era.

The extent to which this amateurism can be explained as something uniquely Liverpool is questionable. The most obvious example of how amateurism spread into the Mersey Beat movement is through the skiffle craze. Skiffle, a music craze that promoted the performance of music for all through the use of instruments that could be

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<sup>298</sup> *Mersey Beat*, 27 February – 12 March 1964.

<sup>299</sup> *New Musical Express*, 26 July 1963.

<sup>300</sup> *New Musical Express*, 9 August 1963.

easily acquired/transformed from other items such as washboards or tea chest basses, in many ways gave the impetus for the Liverpool phenomenon to take shape. The most famous proponent of the craze was Lonnie Donegan, but a number of Liverpool groups started off as skiffle groups, most famously, of course, John Lennon's The Quarrymen. In any case, skiffle was not a trend unique to Liverpool, by any means, yet the impact of the movement is often held up as being crucial to the development of the music scene in Liverpool.

Kingsize Taylor, for example, placed enormous importance on skiffle for influencing the rest of the Mersey Beat era: "[the determination to play music] was like an infection going through the area. A great leveller was skiffle – it was the greatest leveller because it gave every single person, every man in the street, every man, woman and Charlie the ability to play an instrument and enjoy it...it gave everybody this ability to take part in music and I think that was a great thing".<sup>301</sup> That skiffle was a leveller, and allowed people of all classes to participate, had an effect on the extent to which Liverpoolians could play music. The accessibility factor was clearly of huge importance. Brian Jones also prioritised the importance of the phenomenon, "skiffle was the main thing that started it all really, if you think about Lonnie Donegan. When that came out everyone thought it looked easy and there were so many people playing tea chest basses...it was a combination of total amateurs with very little training but a willingness to work their arses off to get good".<sup>302</sup> Amateurism and Liverpool were very closely linked in the media narrative of the period. A piece that attempted to explain the sudden popularity of the 'beat boom' emphasised this clearly, "rock 'n' roll and skiffle were dirty words in those days, smacking of complete amateurism and what amounted to a complicated noise. But the forerunners of today's beat boys had started learning their business, playing guitars, drums and home-made basses...the next stage came with wholesale electrification of guitars".<sup>303</sup>

David Boyce placed huge importance on the emergence of skiffle groups on the wider rock 'n' roll movement in the 1960s in Britain, but did not necessarily suggest that it was a Liverpool thing alone, "it's to do with the fact that the amplification equipment in church halls, places where young teenagers would go to dance and pick

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<sup>301</sup> Oral testimony from Ted 'Kingsize' Taylor, recorded by the author, 10 January 2017.

<sup>302</sup> Oral testimony from Brian Jones, recorded by the author, 6 September 2017.

<sup>303</sup> *DISC*, 28 September 1963.

each other up, didn't have loud amplifiers to play records. So, you went to the local youth club, someone would bring along a ten-watt portable record player, which wasn't very loud. So, if you got three guys and a guitar, a washboard and a string bass – i.e. a skiffle group – it was louder. It was those skiffle groups that transmogrified into the early rock groups...that was why all over the country there were loads and loads of three chord wonder groups around".<sup>304</sup> Boyce's angle here was to claim that skiffle was by no means localised to Liverpool. This is, of course, true. Skiffle was a nationwide phenomenon. This point is emphasised in the music press, too, "skiffle and Lonnie Donegan were responsible for the first wave of do-it-yourself music in the country, outside jazz and home piano sing-songs. All the beat boys who are household words in Britain started playing skiffle in the 'old days' around 1956 – the Beatles, the Shadows, the Dakotas, the Pacemakers and others".<sup>305</sup> The Beatles and the Pacemakers were both, obviously, from Liverpool. The Shadows (London) and the Dakotas (Manchester) were, however, not. The exceptionalism question needs to be asked, therefore. It would be unquantifiable to suggest any innate ability among Liverpudlians to better play guitars and washboards, or to imply that Liverpudlians were more taken with skiffle than the rest of the country, however whilst there seems to be little doubt that Liverpool was enamoured with skiffle, there is little discussion about whether the city was exceptionally so.

There are different approaches in the press on this. On the one hand for some, such as Gerry Marsden, it was not that Liverpool was far ahead of the curve in coming around to skiffle, or that the city was particularly known for being pioneers of the genre. Rather, it was the refusal of young people in Liverpool to let go of the craze, to not adapt to the latest trends, that set the groundwork for the Mersey Beat movement. Alongside a fierce level of competition and determination, Gerry Marsden suggested that, "we didn't throw away our guitars when the skiffle age went into limbo. We kept them, and played them".<sup>306</sup> On the other hand, Bob Wooller, compere of the Cavern Club, put Liverpool's port status at the heart of how skiffle caught on in Liverpool before anywhere else in the country, "the R&B trend caught on here first...as did skiffle in those years back when the Beatles and Gerry and the others had tea-chests and washboards. Lonnie Donegan was

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<sup>304</sup> Oral testimony from David Boyce, recorded by the author, 27 January 2016.

<sup>305</sup> *DISC*, 28 September 1963.

<sup>306</sup> *Hit Parade*, June 1963.

high priest. Local accents made it easy for Liverpudlians to copy". Whatever the reason, there are hints at Liverpool's uniqueness in how it latched on to skiffle, either earlier or later than most other places. On exceptionalism, the answer here, most likely, is that it does not necessarily have to be found in every single contributing factor to the emergence of the Liverpool musical movement in the 1960s. Skiffle was undoubtedly important, as it was the first identifiable example of the accessibility of playing music to the working classes. That Liverpool was thought of as a predominantly working-class place, and depictions of it thereof reinforced this in the media landscape of the city for decades to come, the class paradigm, a part in which amateurism (through, amongst other things, skiffle) played a fundamental role, seems crucial to understanding how Liverpool was represented.

Class was, therefore, an incredibly difficult issue to effectively parse apart from wider understanding of Liverpool itself. Depictions of the city as rough, as violent, as (at times) drunken were extremely common. There is very little evidence, with the exception of a couple of the interviews, of a more nuanced view of the city. That could be because there are not any to be found. Liverpool was far from alone in being a city with a predominantly working-class populace, yet it was almost held up as being the archetypal working-class city within Britain. The need to 'explain' the Mersey Beat phenomenon allowed certain narratives to become dominant within popular discourse. There is no evidence of the national music newspapers making an effort to acquire a more detailed picture of Liverpool, rather it was described as almost one amorphous whole. The easy explanation, as Farson showed, was to define Liverpool in these terms. There is a considerable amount of evidence, as shown, of links being made between the socio-economic status of Liverpool at this time and its popular music, but frustratingly little with precisely *how* social and economic class came to affect this phenomenon that had not been seen in Britain up to that point.

Finally, the class angle is somewhat unsatisfying as *the* solution to the question of Liverpool's supposed exceptionalism. However, this is not surprising. As aforementioned, the likelihood of one characteristic providing a suitable answer to a question like this is small.

## Gender

The Merseybeat phenomenon was one that was, or was presented as being, undoubtedly white and working-class. It was also one that was overwhelmingly male, too. The lack of female groups, in comparison to the male ones, is something that has not gone unnoticed in studies of the period. Pat Ayers, in her work on masculinity in the work-place in post-war Liverpool, provided perspectives on how the phenomenon was part of a much larger trend. For her, “the success of the Beatles and a handful of other local bands offered new role models, added fuel to existing aspirations and, increasingly, linked male identity and competitiveness to consumer acquisitiveness...during the 1960s, in the space between leaving school and marriage, the possession of fashionable clothes, records, and guitars and enough money to pay for nights out in city centre clubs, became vital elements in male identity. Material goods offered new possibilities for personal expression and the forging of inter-male relationships. This was especially so in relation to the almost exclusively male domain of making music”.<sup>307</sup> Therefore, male identity was heavily tied up with the production of music at this time. This, coupled with the growing independence of young men in the post-war period, led to male domination of the Merseybeat phenomenon. The lack of female experience and voices in this period is instructive.

The extent of introspection on the lack of female groups<sup>308</sup> within the Merseybeat movement is fairly limited, but there are examples of the male dominance of the phenomenon being questioned. The *New Record Mirror*, for example, carried an opinion piece in September 1963 bemoaning the lack of young women within the scene: “the boom looks like settling in for a lengthy period. Spearheaded by the Beatles, the bulk of the new talent has come from Liverpool and Manchester. Other areas are now warming up to the battle, but the scene has, so far, been predominantly MALE. Where are the girls? Well there are popular lasses hailing from Merseyside and all could click, given the right record...Liverpool is a hard school. You have to have talent to survive, as the talent is so abundant and so good up there”.<sup>309</sup> The lack of female representation did not escape the notice of the *Daily Mail*, either, when discussing the arrival of Cilla Black onto the popular music scene, “it’s been boys, boys, boys, boys from Merseyside who

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<sup>307</sup> Pat Ayers, ‘Work, Culture and Gender’ p. 158.

<sup>308</sup> There were some, most notably the Liver Birds and, as a solo act, Cilla Black, but few that achieved any notoriety.

<sup>309</sup> *New Record Mirror*, 21 September 1963.

have dominated pop music since the 'Liverpool Sound' started to carry all before it towards the end of last year. Now comes a GIRL from Beatleland – Cilla Black. At 20 she is already well-known on the Liverpool scene. For three years this raw-voiced, red-headed raver has held her own with the boys, playing the Liverpool clubs, singing with the beat groups at the end of sessions, and performing in the Blue Angel, the club where the artists go late at night to escape the fans".<sup>310</sup> Here, then, is at least an example of the male dominance of the phenomenon being questioned and brought up. There are limited other examples, too – such as a short piece in *Melody Maker*, that questioned, "does the beat world belong to men alone? Clearly, the male barrier has been crashed. Two hit parade groups contain girls – the Honeycombs and the Applejacks".<sup>311</sup> Again, however, this is about the extent of introspection and questioning on this front. It was much more the case that this phenomenon was produced for young women rather than being produced by them.

The role that 'girls' played within this phenomenon, therefore, was to be consumers of the product. Mal Jefferson, for example, believed it to be crucial to the appeal of the Beatles, "they were doing what the Germans called Mach Schau – Make Show – jump around, shake your head about and everything. Get the girls going. There was a sexual thing with the girls because most of the boys were quite good looking which fronted the bands. And err...that's what the girls responded to".<sup>312</sup>

Young women were also excluded from the testimonies of many of the interviewees or, to be more accurate, were not seen as being a part of the phenomenon itself, other than as objects of sexual status. A number of interviewees listed "getting girls" (or some variety thereof) as one of the key motivating factors in deciding to play in groups. Girls played a key role in many of the testimonies, but not usually as peers. One interviewee, for example, recalled one of his bandmates having such an effect on young women to the extent that, "the girls were screaming and yelling and he was playing it up. He was very funny. He chased the girl up the stairs, gave her one, came back and carried on playing".<sup>313</sup> The precise nature of this encounter emphasised the extent to which girls were clearly seen as a commodity. They did not have much of a role to play within this extremely male-dominated scene. 'Girls' were also a motivation

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<sup>310</sup> J. Greenwood, 'In swings Cilla, the first girl from Beatleland', *Daily Mail*, (20 September 1963).

<sup>311</sup> *Melody Maker*, 8 August 1964.

<sup>312</sup> Oral testimony from Mal Jefferson, recorded by the author, 12 July 2017.

<sup>313</sup> Oral testimony recorded by the author. Name withheld.



for others. Frankie Connor, for example, suggested that he was mainly inspired by his want, “to get girlfriends. I’m not going to tell any lies. Girls would go ‘hey you can play guitar’ and I was great. As a kid [I would say] ‘I play because of [sensible or artistic] reasons – no, to meet girls, that’s what we did it for”.<sup>314</sup> ‘Girls’ were a key motivator, therefore. On the face of it, this seems to be unsurprising.

‘Girls’, therefore, were not seen to have played a prominent role within the Merseybeat phenomenon. Much like the broader Scouse identity, young women were not expected to participate in the playing of music themselves. Although there were no objections raised to those who did manage to achieve some level of notoriety and success, such as Cilla Black and the Liver Birds, the Merseybeat phenomenon was, like the broader Scouse identity, one that was undoubtedly male. This is not to suggest that this was done intentionally, the success of those such as Cilla Black can be seen as evidence to the contrary. That being said, the motivating factor of ‘chasing girls’ would probably not apply to young women themselves and, with this in mind, one of the key factors that made the Merseybeat phenomenon what it was, was its appeal to teenage girls. The Merseybeat phenomenon was a space which, as Ayers suggests, was dominated by men. The extent to which women/girls are missing from the publicity and success of the other Merseybeat groups might come as a surprise, but when one considers the Scouse identity as a whole – white, working-class, male – it perhaps should not.

### *Class and Gender Paradigms: Conclusions*

Liverpool was depicted as a place of deprivation and violence, sometimes exceptionally so, and the city’s reputation as such a place was elevated to a level where it was used to explain the Merseybeat phenomenon in exceptional terms. While the media depictions of the city never approached anything like the level seen in the 1980s where, as discussed, press coverage was overwhelmingly negative and used to ‘explain’ the city as a consequence, the role that Liverpool’s reputation for deprivation had on creating the image of the city as one that was almost uniquely placed to play this music is clear. If it is to be accepted that ‘working-class’ is a crucial element of the ‘Scouse’ identity,<sup>315</sup> then it can be argued that it did play a crucial role in establishing the

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<sup>314</sup> Oral testimony from Frankie Connor, recorded by the author, 4 October 2015.

<sup>315</sup> Frost, in Kirk, *Northern Identities*, p. 195.

'reason' why this music indeed emerged from Liverpool. The role of young working-class men in creating this music, sometimes justified as a consequence of their working-class status, is convincing. This is not one of the main Belchem factors that supposedly made the city 'exceptional', but it is not discounted as a factor by him. Where Belchem privileges the Irish influence in creating the foundational character of the Scouser in the 'Scotland Road slummy', this is noticeably absent from the class analyses in the Merseybeat period, as shown in Chapter Two.

Nevertheless, the idea that Liverpool was a place of deprivation and that this contributed to the Merseybeat phenomenon is fairly clear. Whether it is the main factor is somewhat more debateable. There were, of course, many other deprived cities in Britain who did not take to beat music with the same gusto that Liverpool did and there are other explanations for this, among them the city's close relationship with the United States and its broader status as a port. It remains true that the city is one that is regarded as a working-class one, yet it is not its working-class status alone that contributes to its sense of apartness, but it is a contributing factor.

The exclusion, too, of female representation from these conceptions aligns with the description of the typical 'Scouse' identity as defined by Frost. The role of young women within the Merseybeat period was that of consumers, rather than creators. Finding the voices of young women within the movement was exceptionally difficult but, importantly, this was something that was noted at the time – most notably by Bill Harry in *Mersey Beat*. Liverpool's reputation as a working-class city was undoubtedly important but, like so many of the other factors, cannot be considered in isolation when assessing its 'apartness'.

## Chapter Two: Cosmopolitanism and Merseybeat

The 2008 Capital of Culture celebrations in Liverpool were a perfect example of the manner in which Liverpool has been depicted in relatively recent years. The representation of Liverpool as “the World in One City” reached its peak at this time and was used in a number of ways to showcase the city’s supposed cosmopolitanism. The truth of this marketing ploy in the city of Liverpool in 2008 reaches far beyond the scope of this project. Nevertheless, the city’s supposed cosmopolitanism is often used to ‘explain’ one or other aspects of its cultural heritage and/or ‘characteristics’. As displayed in the literature review chapter of this thesis, the manner of this cosmopolitanism has taken a number of different shapes. This chapter will start by explaining the context of cosmopolitan cities and the effect that said cosmopolitanism has had on their cultures, identity, and character. It will then examine the effect of ‘cosmopolitanism’ on Liverpool through the use of two case studies – one on the impact of Irish in-migration to the city, and the other on the Afro-Caribbean experience in the city – both with reference to the importance of each to, and representations of, the Merseybeat music phenomenon.

Two different concepts appear throughout the chapter. First, how to measure the direct influences of different cultures on Merseybeat. For example, when looking at how black American artists’ music was directly imported, covered, and re-released, the analysis of this influence is, if not straightforward, at least somewhat quantifiable. Second, by contrast, ideas surrounding concepts such as a ‘musical atmosphere’ were far harder to effectively measure. This was most notable in the examination of ‘Irishness’, itself a nebulous concept, when being used to scrutinise any idea that Liverpool is or was a ‘musical city’ as a consequence of that. The idea that ‘Irishness’ has a line of causation to Liverpool alleged musicality, though vaguely understood in the city, has proven most difficult to pin down.

Liverpool is, of course, far from alone in its position as a supposed model of cosmopolitanism. It is also far from the only city that has had considerable amounts of Irish in-migration.

## **Section 1: Irish Music and Merseybeat**

The extent to which music is used generally as an expression of identity should be beyond question.<sup>316</sup> Music is a key method through which people can express their longing towards home, or the upkeep of traditions embedded in their individual heritages. Expressions of Irishness through Irish music have been well-covered in a number of different places, including earlier in this research. For example, Nicholas Carolan's study of Francis O'Neill and Irish music in Chicago, referenced earlier, is insightful on how a culture can be maintained in a foreign city. Mairtin Mac an Ghail and Chris Haywood's study of first-generation male Irish migrants into Britain, particularly Birmingham, after the Second World War is helpful, too. In these, the maintenance of Irish traditions is clear and given clear Irish explanation and this maintenance for first-generation Irish migrants, whatever the location or time period, is of crucial importance. The image of post-1945 Birmingham described above sounds extremely familiar to the Liverpool of the nineteenth century described by Belchem. The 'Irishness' of these traditions cannot be doubted.

Similarly, for an actual Irishman like Francis O'Neill, the maintenance of this different culture was of paramount importance. He was born in Ireland, moved to Chicago, and thus his memories of home, of that Irish culture, were authentic and lived. There are a multitude of different issues when it comes to categorising second-generation Irish and beyond. Holli and Jones ensure to provide appropriate balance to the new social category of 'Irish-Americans' in their study of Chicago in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, "in the eyes of most non-Irish Chicagoans, Irish Americans were a monolithic group. And yet, though they formed a relatively cohesive community, the Chicago Irish were by no means a homogeneous lot...despite a common Irish Catholic heritage, their geographical backgrounds were far from identical. The most obvious difference, of course, existed between those born in Ireland and those born in America. The former had grown up in a predominantly Catholic, rural, and old-world environment, the latter in one that was more Protestant, urban, and industrialised".<sup>317</sup> The difference, therefore, between first and second (and beyond) generation migrants is crucial to understanding the Liverpoolian paradigm. As

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<sup>316</sup> See, e.g. Connell and Gibson, *Sound Tracks*, Stokes (ed.) *Ethnicity, Identity and Music*, Hudson, *Regions and Place: Music, Identity and Place*.

<sup>317</sup> Holli and Jones, *Ethnic Chicago*, p. 82.

explained before, most Irish in-migration to Liverpool came about over a century prior to the Merseybeat phenomenon.

The Liverpool question for this issue is therefore considerably different. The time elapsed from the first wave of Irish migrants that arrived in Liverpool to the Merseybeat period is sufficiently long that questions should be asked about the extent of the effect of 'Irishness' on the production of the Liverpool Sound and, indeed, about its effect on the city as a whole in the twentieth century. That is, the effect that 'Irishness' can have as the generations proceed must be taken into consideration.

Marion Leonard's work on how the relatively modern Scouse-Irish identities may have worked in practice is instructive. Conducting her research on 'music and dance practitioners in Liverpool who strongly identify as Irish', Leonard showed how for her Liverpool respondents, "step-dancing was a way to signify their British-Irish identity and offered a sense of connection with family practices in Ireland. Interviewees thus articulated a double sense of belonging both to a home of past ancestors and to a local community within Liverpool founded upon a shared ethnic identity".<sup>318</sup> One of Leonard's most notable conclusions, however, is that, "'Irishness' of second- or third-generation people can be understood as a complex construction and disputed identity. Unmarked by skin colour or accent this Irishness is not self-evident *so it must be claimed* [emphasis added], yet these claims are open to contestation with debate centring on whether their Irishness is 'genuine' or whether it can instead be viewed as manufactured or 'plastic'".<sup>319</sup> So, therefore, whilst the performance of Irish dancing practices were important for those willing to claim their 'Irishness', this would logically exclude enormous numbers of 'Scouse' people who make no such attempt. This is without considering, too, those who identify as 'Scouse', but have no Irish heritage at all. This is also to leave out the most pertinent fact about the effect of Irishness on Liverpudlian music at this time – the music that became nationally popular and put Liverpool in a position of cultural significance that it had hitherto not enjoyed, was very clearly not Irish in origin.

The link between the issues discussed thus far and the Merseybeat music phenomenon may not be clear on first glance. It is certainly difficult to draw direct lines

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<sup>318</sup> M. Leonard, 'Performing Identities: music and dance in the Irish communities of Coventry and Liverpool', in *Social and Cultural Geography*, Vol 6 (4), (August 2005), p. 521.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid*, p. 522.

of causation from the influence of the Liverpool-Irish on the nineteenth-century city and to the musical phenomenon of the 1960s. Nevertheless, attempts to draw causal links between the city's Irish heritage and the Merseybeat phenomenon were and are made, and with surprising regularity. Much of the writing on said topic focuses on Liverpool as a whole, and the city's musical heritage as a whole, rather than a root-and-branch investigation of which particular aspects of Merseybeat could be definitively described as 'Irish' and those that could not. This type of methodology would be patently absurd and extremely reductive. There will be no attempts in this thesis to suggest that certain groups or bands were 'more or less Irish' than others, that particular types of music were 'more or less Irish' than others. Rather, a much wider view of the phenomenon itself are to be combined with the personal experiences of the interviewees and the newspaper research to provide documentation of whether this period in Liverpool's history was, or is, explained through reference to Ireland.

The existing secondary writing on Liverpool music more generally does occasionally point to Ireland's importance in supposedly making the city a 'musical' one. For example, there is a clear difference in the evidence gathered for this research where there are direct influences on Merseybeat, and others, as tends to be the case with the secondary literature, of how Irishness contributed to a nebulous concept like 'atmosphere' in which any kind of music might emerge. The issue with 'atmosphere' and suchlike is the difficulty in pinning it down and giving it acceptable definition. Belchem, for example, suggests that, "music perhaps offers the best insight into Liverpool's distinctiveness or 'otherness' ...the Irish have contributed much to the local music scene, as the recent boom in Irish pub music attests, but they are only one voice within a wider mixture. Although privileged in heritage and autobiographical accounts, the 'community' mentality of the slummy co-existed with a broader culture, a seafaring cosmopolitanism".<sup>320</sup> Even here, then, is the recognition that 'Irishness' alone cannot explain what is supposedly the most 'exceptional' aspect of Liverpoolian culture – music but this is totally in line with Belchem's broader thesis of Liverpoolian exceptionalism; the combination of Liverpool being a port city and the resultant influx of enormous numbers of Irish, but also the other cultures that gave the city its cosmopolitan features.

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<sup>320</sup> Belchem, *Merseypride*, p. 60.

Sara Cohen also described the importance of Irish in-migration to the Liverpudlian musical palate, pointing to the idea that, “Irish immigrants have commonly expressed through music a longing for the people and country they have left behind and strong notions of home. These themes and sentiments are evident in some of the Irish-influenced folk songs that have been written about Liverpool, such as ‘The Leaving of Liverpool’ and ‘In My Liverpool Home’”.<sup>321</sup> The issue is, of course, how applicable this formulation is to the Merseybeat movement. Much of the music within this period was not actually about Liverpool – mainly because the vast majority of it consisted of covers of American records. The Beatles, it is true, became more wistful for the city as their careers progressed (e.g. *Penny Lane*, *Strawberry Fields Forever*) but the extent of Liverpool-centric music that was put into the charts is very limited. Limited, perhaps, only to Gerry and the Pacemakers’ *Ferry Cross the Mersey*.

The definitive book on Liverpool music as a whole, written by Paul du Noyer, privileges the Irish aspect enormously. Whilst arguing that “music is the heart of Liverpool”, du Noyer suggests that, “like Ireland – from where it acquired the habit, I think – Liverpool is notorious for the sentimentality of its exiles...Liverpool’s talent for self-mythologising is probably unequalled”.<sup>322</sup> Du Noyer, too, emphasises the importance of performance in the city. For him, “generations of Irish settlers and their descendants kept the old traditions alive. Like exiles everywhere, they were often more zealous than the people back home. The purist tendency encouraged ceilidh bands and Gaelic refrains, but the more common influence was simply a love of singing out loud, for the family or the pub. The favoured tunes might come from Dublin, or Hollywood, Sligo or London...the impulse to perform was the most important thing – hundreds of Liverpool rock musicians grew up with that culture in their backgrounds...the Irish shaped many facets of the Scouse character – a taste for defiance and a subversive way with verbal ingenuity among them – but their greatest contribution was the view of music as one of life’s necessities”.<sup>323</sup> The link is made clear on two fronts – first, the role of the Irish is absolutely fundamental to any perceived musicality of Liverpool. Second, that the performative aspect of singing, however formal, had Irish roots, irrespective of

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<sup>321</sup> S. Cohen, *Decline, Renewal and the City in Popular Music Culture: Beyond the Beatles*, (Aldershot: Ashgate 2007), pp. 15-16.

<sup>322</sup> Du Noyer, *Liverpool: Wondrous Place: from the Cavern to the Capital of Culture*, (London: Virgin, 2007), p. 5.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid*, p. 55.

whether the songs themselves were Irish. Du Noyer does also draw attention towards other aspects that played a role, particularly that of the Welsh, but the key influence is Liverpool's proximity to the Irish Sea. Du Noyer refers, also, to the wider influence that he sees Ireland having on English pop as a whole. This, he suggests, is "mostly accounted for by the combined dominance of Liverpool and Manchester" but also refers to Bono, lead singer of the Irish band U2, presenting at an awards ceremony in which he would nod towards different acts, including: "Paul McCartney: 'The Beatles! One of ours!' The Gallagher brothers: 'Oasis! One of ours!'".<sup>324</sup>

Balancing this is the extent to which 'Irishness' is not considered to be a factor within similar literature. From the outset, it should be made clear that an absence of discussion on a topic is to neither be taken as a belief that such a topic does not exist, nor that it has been explicitly ruled out. That being said, there is a clear lack of introspection and discussion on the potential for Irish heritage to have played much of a role in the Merseybeat phenomenon. In many cases, this is understandable. A lot of the literature concerns, obviously, the Beatles and as such is focussed on the material that is most likely to attract the most interest – the personal relationships between people and the aspects of upbringings and youth that can be accurately quantified, such as an obsession with American music, or a friendship such as that between John Lennon and Paul McCartney. Spencer Leigh, who has written by far the most on the Merseybeat phenomenon, pays some attention to the 'Irishness' idea, but does not go into much detail. For Leigh, the extent of investigation in this regard is limited to general observations such as, "the links between Liverpool and the Irish have continued to the present, with many Liverpool-Irish families living in the city",<sup>325</sup> "the Roman Catholic Cathedral is contemporary, a huge tent-like structure in the shape of a crown. It is known affectionately as the Mersey Funnel or Paddy's Wigwam, and again, note the Irish reference",<sup>326</sup> or, quoting Ken Dodd, "Liverpool is a tremendously exuberant city...one reason is that Liverpool's always been a very cosmopolitan city. There's an ethnic mixture of Welsh, Irish, and Scots, as well as the English. We had a Chinese quarter before San Francisco".<sup>327</sup> Leigh, by rule, seems far more concerned with the

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<sup>324</sup> *Ibid*, p. 55.

<sup>325</sup> S. Leigh, *Twist and Shout: Merseybeat, The Cavern, The Star-Club, and the Beatles*, (Liverpool: Nirvana 2004), p. 1.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.



American influence on Liverpool,<sup>328</sup> even if he is sceptical of the importance of the Cunard Yanks.

Sam Leach (a prominent Liverpool promoter at the time) also offers little by way of insight into this issue focussing, instead, on his personal experiences with the Merseybeat phenomenon. The extent of discussion of Ireland in his *The Rocking City: The Explosive Birth of the Beatles* is limited to the engagement to his partner on St Patrick's Day and a supposed connection to King Brian Boru, which he then dismisses as, "it was only in later years I discovered that most Irish families claim similar lineage".<sup>329</sup> Again, this might be expected given the nature of the book based, as it is, on personal testimony and experience, rather than an attempt to effectively explain why the Merseybeat phenomenon happened.

There appears to be more of an acceptance that the 'Irish' angle can only be understood within a much larger context. Similar to Belchem's main argument that the 'slummy' character has been privileged over a broader, 'seafaring cosmopolitanism', the above examples do the same. The Irish are rarely explained in isolation, but rather as a part of a much larger whole. For example, Allan Kozinn's book on the Beatles does exactly this, "the city also had a more colourful ethnic make-up than many other English cities at this time. There was a large Irish population, as well as sizeable Jamaican, Indian, Chinese, Slavic and Jewish communities, making Liverpool the kind of cultural melting-pot that New York was and London was not. These influences, both individually and in their mixture, can be heard tellingly."<sup>330</sup> It is difficult, therefore, to consider the Irish in isolation but the important role that Ireland plays within whatever can be described as a collective Liverpool consciousness must be explored – such is its centrality to the wider Liverpool character.

### *The impact of Irishness on everyday Liverpool*

A common theme throughout the oral history research is the manner in which the interviewees privileged their early lives, and the way in which 'Irish' heritage was used to explain the innate musicality of their families, or the ways in which 'Irishness'

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<sup>328</sup> See Leigh, *Twist and Shout*, pp. 28-42 and 'Growing up with the Beatles' in M. Leonard and S. Strachan (eds), *The Beat Goes On: Liverpool, Popular Music, and the Changing City* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010) pp. 35-37.

<sup>329</sup> S. Leach, *The Rocking City: The Explosive Birth of the Beatles*, (Gwynedd: Pharoah, 1999) p. 160.

<sup>330</sup> A. Kozinn, *The Beatles*, (London: Phaidon, 1995) p. 16.

intersected with other aspects of everyday life. Though these kinds of testimony were used to give context to a broader idea of musicality, they often struggled to make explicit links with the Merseybeat phenomenon. Rather, the early life experiences of the interviewees, with regard to Irishness, often combined with two of the key characteristics that have been used to define the city: class, and cosmopolitanism.

Frankie Connor used the idea of a 'good Liverpool do' to explain how he acquired the taste for musical performance from a young age. He first explained how such an event was both fundamentally a Liverpool thing and how it was linked to Ireland: "I think a Liverpool do is a good old do. It's probably an Irish thing looking back because my family were Irish, well we all are way back. Connections are obviously very strong with Ireland. My family came from Cork back in the 18[00s]".<sup>331</sup> Here the point is fairly obvious – the concept of a family gathering to sing songs was, for Connor, closely linked with his family's Irish heritage. He described such occasions as follows, "I remember parties as a kid, sneaking downstairs when I was supposed to be in bed and I see uncles in the front room with a parlour and a crate of beer back from the pub. A crate of brown ale. That's what...not particularly fancy or, you know, classy but there was someone on the piano and there'd be a sing song, people would have to do a turn".<sup>332</sup> The manner in which Connor suggests that the event was not 'classy' has clear class connotations, too. A Liverpool 'do' was, in Connor's opinion, clearly linked to Ireland, and it was not an occasion that could be considered 'classy'. For him, these kinds of occasions were both fundamentally Liverpool and fundamentally Ireland, too and they were also working-class events, with uncles carrying crates of brown ale given class signifiers. The class dimension in linking Ireland and Liverpool becomes clear, therefore. With that being said, however, singing songs and drinking in a pub are not exclusively Irish traits, though they may have been constructed as such after the fact. It is unclear whether he considered them "unclassy" because of the Irish aspect, but the manner in which they were combined to be presented as such is clear.

Albie Donnelly had a similar experience of youth to Frankie Connor, but he came to different conclusions. He too was of Irish heritage but was largely silent on the class question. Rather, he was critical of what he perceived as the tendency of some to play up their 'Irishness' and become, as he described, "*Oirish*" overnight. He claimed that, "a

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<sup>331</sup> Oral testimony from Frankie Connor, recorded by the author, 4 October 2015.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*

lot of people get very romantic about these things. I do remember parties when I was a kid. If you went to Scotland Road, the bars were always there...there would be people singing, not many people who could play the piano. They would sing and go to the pub and you'd end up with your cousin standing outside the pub for hours...round the piano, old Irish granny stuff – it doesn't really wash as far as I'm concerned. I mean we did have these parties where we were all singing and stuff but they certainly weren't singing Irish rebel songs. Probably singing Out of My Heart or the latest pop song of the day".<sup>333</sup>

Donnelly describes exactly the same scenario as Connor but reaches totally different conclusions. For him, the 'Irishness' of these kinds of gathering is highly dubious as he prioritised the songs being sung as representative of that 'Irishness', rather than the simple act of singing itself. This seems to be a sensible approach to take as singing is, of course, absolutely not a uniquely Irish trait or pastime. Important, too, is Donnelly's description of people becoming *Oirish*, that being the idea that their 'Irishness' was somehow put-on or constructed, in much the same way that Marion Leonard described above. This critical reflection is important – for Donnelly, the singing of actual Irish songs would have been a good example of Irishness in action. This did not happen. Donnelly was also keen to situate the 'Irish' angle within a much wider framework. He, similar to the discussion above, agreed with an 'Irish' influence, but that contextualisation was also important, "I think it has to be the people. The strange mixture of Irish and Welsh. If you didn't know anything about the city, for the past couple of hundred years when you see the mixture...the bloody millions of Irish that came here and all settled in one area and the other area...it was full of Africans, West Indians...".<sup>334</sup> 'Irishness' is, therefore, situated within a much broader milieu – the supposed cosmopolitan nature of Liverpool that consisted of a ethnic and cultural make-up far exceeding the relatively simplistic "Irish" angle.

This was expanded upon in other interviews. Though Irish heritage undoubtedly played a key role in the lives of many of the interviewees some, such as Paul du Noyer, recognised that their own experience may not have been repeated elsewhere. Du Noyer was clear when acknowledging his own bias, but explained his Irish heritage as follows, "My Dad was a merchant sailor and my family were Irish. It's possible that I may have

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<sup>333</sup> Oral testimony from Albie Donnelly, recorded by the author, 4 October 2015.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*

overemphasised these bits of the Liverpool legacy because they were the Liverpool that I grew up in. Both my mother and father's families were Irish and he was in the merchant navy. Those things were overwhelmingly dominant in my memory, as they were for most of the people I was growing up with." By acknowledging his own biases within his personal Irish heritage, du Noyer realises that his experience is his own, and the reference to the construction of his own memory certainly adds to this idea. Referring also to the geographical constraints of his Irishness, "another proviso is that ours was an Irish Catholic family and you only went to school with other Catholic families who were themselves invariably Irish and more likely than not to be from dockland backgrounds. In some ways that's the stereotypical Scouse biography and I did have that growing up so all those things I am receptive to".<sup>335</sup> Du Noyer, therefore, is quite straight forward in acknowledging the problems with his view of Liverpool's inherent 'Irishness', such is the strength of his own heritage in this regard. Finally, when combined with his geographical explanation, one can see how the experience of the subject can affect how one constructs one's own imposed image of a place: "I grew up in North Liverpool where...everybody was actually Irish." Du Noyer, therefore, had no reason to even consider Liverpool as anything other than influenced by Ireland. This thread is picked up in a later section of this chapter.

Interviewees without Irish heritage provided their own insight into how 'Irishness' impacted day-to-day life in the city. Some, such as Chris Huston who, while suggesting that any comebacks he had to barbed words from others were based on "the background of being Irish, or Welsh, or Liverpool as a whole",<sup>336</sup> suggested that any concepts of 'Irishness' did not affect him due to him being adopted from a Bernardo's home in North Wales after the Second World War. Others recognised 'Irish' cultural markers even where they had no such heritage themselves. Huston could offer very little by way of recognising any role that 'Irishness' played within his own upbringing. Similarly, Ozzie Yue is a man of Chinese heritage and he too was obviously unable to provide any insight into the effect of 'Irishness' on his own upbringing. He was, however, far more forthcoming on the role of Ireland within the city itself: "I was obviously aware of it in Liverpool because of the orange parades. Every year I used to see the orange parade so it was obviously...used to be great. So, I used to go out and

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<sup>335</sup> Oral testimony from Paul du Noyer, recorded by the author, 18 February 2016.

<sup>336</sup> Oral testimony from Chris Huston, recorded by the author, 3 November 2016.

watch the parade – see the running fights occasionally. So yeah, I was aware in that sense of the Irish heritage of the town”.<sup>337</sup> For Ozzie, there is a certain detachment from some of the outwardly identifiable ‘Irish’ markers of the city – although orange parades were certainly not an event that united Liverpool’s Irish community. Interestingly, however, he suggested that he adopted a key part of Liverpool’s Irish heritage and therefore ‘Irishness’ affected him personally, too, as, in his view, “the Scouse accent is to some extent from the Irish. So, that’s a bit of me with my Scouse accent!”.<sup>338</sup> The importance of Irish heritage to ordinary Liverpudlians, regardless of their actual heritage, cannot be understated. Even among members of the Chinese community, the ‘Irish’ angle of being Scouse did not necessarily exclude ‘outside’ members even if they were not Irish. Whether this is evidence of the transformation of those members of the Irish enclave that Belchem described so well into, as the generations passed, a broader ‘Scouse’ mentality that was inclusive of other races and ethnicities, is up for question.

David Boyce provided evidence, not just of him not having Irish heritage, but also of vehement anti-Irish, or anti-Catholic, sentiment to whatever end the two terms are synonymous. The hallmarks of sectarianism that were so prominent in Liverpool in the early twentieth century were still apparent in this period. Relaying a story of a Labour canvasser visiting a working-class street in south Liverpool, Boyce claimed that “he said he’d go to a street that theoretically you’d think would be solid Labour because it was working class. He’d walk into the street and he’d go to the first house and there’d be a statuette of King Billy [William of Orange] in the window and he thought, ‘no point’”.<sup>339</sup> Explaining, too, his grandmother’s belief that “she was somehow frightened or concerned about the Catholics taking over...oh Granny, forgive me! My grandmother was such a xenophobe, she was Welsh. She hated the Irish. She would never say that directly but there was always...you know when you’re a kid you pick up the background noise?”.<sup>340</sup> Boyce’s stories display a population that was not totally comfortable with accepting the Scouse/Irish paradigm. Crucially, however, Boyce’s case is possible to contextualise because he is from, and grew up on, the Wirral. His descriptions of a Catholic friend being “exotic” and “even in the state schools round here there were no Catholics” reveals a much different experience to those interviewees that grew up in the

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<sup>337</sup> Oral testimony from Ozzie Yue recorded by the author, 23 February 2016.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>339</sup> Oral testimony from David Boyce, recorded by the author, 27 January 2016.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*

City of Liverpool itself, and should be considered within this context. The spatial geography plays a role here, too. By his own admission, he did not consider himself 'Scouse' but rather a much wider label of 'being from Merseyside'.

These accounts provide an insight into how different people, all of roughly the same age (and certainly the same gender) interacted with different concepts of 'Irishness' within Liverpool. Some believed it to be a fundamental pillar of their upbringing, and therefore on their later musical careers, others not so much. Some have absolutely no Irish background and yet, like Ozzie Yue, recognise that aspects of Liverpool's own Irish heritage lived on through them within the accent they use. It is quite striking that almost all of the interviewees were able to recall clear aspects of 'Irishness' in Liverpool from their childhoods, or early adult lives. Therefore, even if they themselves were unable to draw upon Irish heritage, the manner in which this concept impacted everyday lives is considerable. The conclusion to be reached on this front is that 'Irishness', as an everyday concept, as it could be found in family trees and convivial gatherings, did exist in Liverpool at this time. The extent of its direct influence over the Merseybeat phenomenon, however, is far more questionable.

#### *The Irish Influence on Liverpool Music and Merseybeat*

Identity, as it goes to the heart of this thesis, is crucial in determining the degree of Irish influence on the city. The oral history evidence is conclusive in Irishness being in some way a part of Liverpudlian identity, whether as it was understood at the time, or in retrospect. However, the actual impact on the music in the period being examined is far less clear. There is a divide, within the interviews, between those who were keen to talk about Irishness in a semi-mystical sense, as if it is somehow seared into the collective memory of every Liverpudlian, and those who were unable to bring specific examples to bear on how this supposedly all-permeating cultural characteristic directly affected the music of the 1960s from the city.

Each interviewee was forthcoming on how the Irish affected Liverpool with regard to supposedly making the city more musical. Frankie Connor, for example, typified most of the responses in this regard:

But the Irish thing was I think people would come to entertain. People who are Irish are generally happy-go-lucky and by nature they are generally. I know I am and my family are in the main. One or two miserable ones but we don't mention them. But in the main people do sort of have a good time and it usually mean the pub or the accordion, a sing

song. Any good old Irish do, even an Irish wake, a funeral. You know, laughter. It's almost inherent...people say, 'where are you from' I say, 'Liverpool, the capital of Ireland'. It's often spoken as that because obviously prior to the influx in the 1840s, Liverpool was a tiny little hamlet really and they came in their thousands...the influence can be underestimated. Really, it's very strong because theatricality and musicality is an Irish [trait], it's inherent in the race.<sup>341</sup>

This is a very clear example of how the city's Irish heritage is promoted by Liverpoolians when trying to explain whether or not the city is inherently musical. For Connor, the link is crucial. Liverpool is for him 'the capital of Ireland' – presumably meaning the capital of Ireland outside Ireland. The character clichés of Liverpool in which the city is sometimes referred to as having a good sense of humour, being a musical place and so on, here are both given 'Irish' explanation. The 'do', the wake and funeral are all given 'Irish' explanation and used as examples of spaces where the Irish could perform their supposedly inherent musicality. The musicality, for Connor, is 'inherent in the race'. This kind of explanation could never be effectively evidenced, because essentialist statements on musicality simply cannot, but the purpose of this discussion is not to do so. That being said, the manner in which Connor describes it is reflective more of how he viewed Liverpool's supposedly musical nature as being inextricably tied up within the concept of inherent Irish musicality too. The strength of feeling for Connor is so strong that he describes Liverpoolians as having essentialist connections to this Irish musicality, even though it can never be effectively proven. Although not totally immaterial, the status which Connor affords Irish musicality is indicative of the prominence of Irishness within the broader Liverpoolian identity or, at the very least, the Liverpoolian identity constructed within Connor's own life experiences.

Connor's suggestion that Liverpool was a 'tiny little hamlet' is an exaggeration but the extent of in-migration to the city, particularly from Ireland, in the mid-nineteenth century backs up the point he was trying to make. Although the area under examination changed, the population of Liverpool in 1801 was estimated at 77,653. By 1851 the population had increased over five times to 375,955.<sup>342</sup> This increase was spurred on by migration to the city; by 1851 49% of Liverpool borough's population

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<sup>341</sup> Oral testimony from Frankie Connor, recorded by the author, 4 October 2015.

<sup>342</sup> R. Lawton, 'The Components of Demographic Change in a Rapidly Growing Port-City: The Case of Liverpool in the Nineteenth Century' in Richard Lawton and Robert Lee (eds) *Population and Society in Western European Port-Cities c.1650-1939*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002) p. 102.

was born outside Lancashire and the Irish-born alone accounted for 22.3% of the borough's entire population.<sup>343</sup> The causal links are difficult to make here, but the sheer weight of Irish numbers should provide pause for thought. The issues are numerous: whether there was a 'tipping point' for Liverpool, or a point at which the city became the cosmopolitan, destination-of-choice for Irish migrants and, crucially, the time when it could effectively be argued that the city became influenced by its newly-arrived Irish inhabitants and then whether or not the characteristics of the 'Irish' eventually became part of the later identity of 'Liverpudlian' or 'Scouse'. The 'weight of numbers' argument should be treated with care – such a crude methodology would likely not produce a conclusive answer and the simple addition of 'Irish' and 'not-Irish' would be not be satisfactory in matters such as these. For Connor, the Irish are absolutely crucial to what Liverpool would become. It was a city in England, but it was a city where Irish migrants were a fundamental part of that city – the Liverpool of 1801 bore absolutely no resemblance to the city of 1851 and beyond. Determining the 'truth' of Connor's statement, necessary though it is, does not focus on the key issue, however. More important is the prominence that he places on Irishness within the history of the city – Irishness goes to the heart of Liverpool to the extent that it was nothing but a simple hamlet before the substantial in-migration across the Irish Sea. The temptation of some to describe Liverpool as a 'musical city' or explain its sense of humour is, for Frankie Connor, something that was clearly of Irish heritage.

The above shows the issues in dealing with analyses of identity formulation. If one applies strict methodological processes to some of the concepts that exist within an individual or a collective memory then often those memories or identities can be seen to be lacking. The clear clash between those interviewees who privilege (through folklore and the nebulous concept of 'influence') the impact of the city's Irish heritage on Merseybeat, and those who deny any link at all, is obvious to see. The manner in which these links were made switched between the explicit and the implied. Some of the collated evidence consisted of explicit links being made between the city's Irishness and Liverpool's apparent disposition for the creation of music. The degree to which these links were convincing, however, is questionable.

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<sup>343</sup> *Ibid*, p. 115.



The figures of Irish in-migration to the city, mentioned above, should be understood within the context of the Merseybeat music phenomenon. The changing character of the city should be comprehended and understood, but this does not necessarily mean that the period studied could be defined as being inspired by 'Irishness'. The strength of this feeling among some of the interviewees was striking, but what was more so was the inability of most of the interviewees to give specific examples of how the Irish aspect of their lives fundamentally affected their ability, or desire, to play in these Liverpool groups. Every recollection was framed in general, non-specific terms.

Faron Ruffley was one interviewee who attempted to make this connection, playing up the importance of the Irish for the city and for himself, "well we had the Irish influence. Irish songs, man...Irish music was great – if you check nearly every family tree in Liverpool there's an Irish connection somewhere...what Lonnie [Donegan] did was sell black music back to the Americans. But what the Irish did was give us soul. They gave us our soul. When you listen to Paul McCartney doing Yesterday or Let It Be – that's his mother, Mary".<sup>344</sup> For Ruffley, the point rests on Liverpool being a key point of arrival for people leaving Ireland. It does, however, suffer from similar problems to those already outlined – those of definition. It would seem to be extremely difficult to effectively explain how 'Irishness' as a vague concept affected popular music in the 1960s. Referring to ideas such as 'soul' merely muddies the issue even more. These terms are not easily quantifiable, and yet their persistence does suggest that 'Irishness', whatever form it took, was an important issue for some of these interviewees. With that being said, Ruffley did at least manage to make some kind of connection, through reference to *Let It Be*. This, however, must be treated with caution. Released in 1970, *Let It Be* came well after the Beatles had left Liverpool – and outside of the period under investigation for this research. The Beatles' wistful songs that were actually about Liverpool came after they had left the city, too,<sup>345</sup> which actually works to fit them within the theory that the importance of Irishness in this period was retrospective, rather than contemporary.

Care must, of course, be taken to not essentialise Irishness. It would be extremely hard to find clear lines of causation between a vague sense of Liverpool being a musical

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<sup>344</sup> Oral testimony from Faron Ruffley, recorded by the author, 6 September 2017.

<sup>345</sup> *Penny Lane* (1966), *Strawberry Fields Forever*, (1967) being just two examples.

city (and importantly, for it to be exceptionally so, when compared to other cities) and mass Irish in-migration. Musicality is not a uniquely Irish concept and, as it should always be made clear, Liverpool was not the only city where beat music was played, commercialised, and performed – followed closely as it was by the British Invasion of the United States, and the musical revolutions of the mid-late Sixties which had a lot to do with the Beatles, but were nowhere near as Liverpool-centric as the early decade had been. Other interviewees managed to effectively compartmentalise the importance of Irish migrants to Liverpool more generally, as well as to question the importance of them to the Merseybeat movement. The Irish were, for Kingsize Taylor, “prolific music players. That’s why there were so many Irish pubs in Liverpool. Drinking and playing or listening to music go together, in fact it’s obligatory. If you want to go into an Irish pub you’d better be prepared for someone who’s going to blast your eardrums off with a ukulele...Liverpool wouldn’t exist without the Irish, put it that way”.<sup>346</sup> For Taylor, these were different phenomena, as he went on to explain, “[Irishness] as for influencing music, no. It might have influenced the likes of the Spinners, Irish stuff. Good Irish bands about, good Irish rock bands came over to Germany, but not out of Liverpool. The best Irish bands that came to the Star Club [in Hamburg] were from Ireland, from Dublin”.<sup>347</sup> For Taylor, therefore, there exists the need to properly define where the Irish influence begins and ends. Later in the interview he suggested that he “did Ireland a bit of an injustice. In fact, that shanty end of the seaport, a lot of them were English, but the majority of shanties came out of Ireland and they swept the world like buggery. Every shanty song you hear in Liverpool you’ll hear in Hamburg because they use it and change the words into German, but it’s Maggie May whichever way you put it”,<sup>348</sup> before moving on to suggest that “without the Irish we wouldn’t have the tunnels, would we? It was the Irish that dug the tunnels and most of the buildings here. Must have left an impression somewhere down the line”.<sup>349</sup> For Taylor, therefore, this is a matter that is very hard to define. His casual ‘it must have left an impression somewhere’ sums up many of the responses found in this research. There is a widespread assumption, often unsatisfactorily articulated or explained, that the Irish simply must have played a role in

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<sup>346</sup> Oral testimony from Ted ‘Kingsize’ Taylor, recorded by the author, 10 January 2017.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*

some regard. This is not good enough to back up the idea that Irishness is/was crucial to this particular aspect of Liverpoolian history.

Mal Jefferson's testimony played out in a similar manner. With regard to the influence of Ireland, and the Irish, on Liverpool music, Jefferson is forthcoming with how it particularly influenced the country material. For him the most obvious way was through "a lot of pub bands and ceilidh bands and a lot of things. And it was around. The one [CD compilation] I'm doing at the moment, *Looking for Lennon*, the first four tracks, two of them are Cumbrian and an Irish band playing a jig. So it was an important influence on him. But I don't know what kind of link-up it makes to Mersey Sound at all, I cannot see it. Because nobody played a flute or a borran did they? Maybe the rhythm got into it a little bit...there was a lot of Irish in Liverpool so it must have permeated in some way, but I can't see what kind of direct influence it would have had on Mersey Sound. I can't see it. Irish [people] didn't have drum kits or play guitar. They had a banjo and a flute or something. I don't see any direct correlation. I can't see any relation between the Irish and the country bands. The travelling people do the flute playing the melody behind the fella who's singing. It's not Danny Boy, it's fiddling about. I don't see any relation with Mersey Beat at all".<sup>350</sup> Jefferson, therefore, has no issue with explaining the importance of Ireland and Irish culture to Liverpool music on a wider level, but struggles to find any empirical evidence that could justify a direct relationship between Irish music and Mersey Beat. Once one moves beyond platitudinous descriptions of how important Ireland was to Liverpool, and asks direct questions with relation to whether the city's 'Irishness' was crucial to a period in which the city reached its cultural zenith, the answers are largely unsatisfactory.

These responses, by Taylor and Jefferson, typify many of the ones encountered in this research. It is far harder to effectively explain how 'Irishness' affected one's day-to-day decisions nearly fifty years prior than it is, for example, to remember what it felt like to play instruments with friends. Brian Jones, for example, employed similar tactics to Jefferson and Taylor. His initial thoughts on the Liverpool/Irish connection was to excitedly claim, like Connor did above, that Liverpool was "the capital of Ireland!". When questioned further, however, he was keen to emphasise that there were other influences that were just as important, "I wouldn't say it was any more [influential]...I

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<sup>350</sup> Oral testimony from Mal Jefferson, recorded by the author, 12 July 2017.

wasn't aware to that extent. But I think there was a lot of influence, not just Irish music, but country music, blues and that too. Skiffle was the main thing that started it all really, if you think about Lonnie Donegan".<sup>351</sup> The impact of these statements, therefore, has to be treated with extreme caution as they are the most likely to be affected by the passage of time and ex post facto application of what one considers now to be 'typically Liverpool' to the experiences then. Jones is totally typical in being unable to accurately point at clear Irish influence and he, like Jefferson and Taylor, recognised the importance of Irish in-migration to Liverpool in general terms – there is, it should be said, no argument to be had on this point – but on music the articulation of clearly 'Irish' influences is noticeably weaker than, for example, American inspiration which can be clearly justified and evidenced through the work of the Cunard Yanks, amongst others.

The newspaper evidence with regard to specific identification of 'Irishness' as a cause or influence on Merseybeat is astonishingly thin. To put it simply, there is almost zero evidence that 'Irishness' was a factor that was considered within the music press at this time. Indeed, as far as it is possible to tell, the only pertinent references to Liverpool's Irish heritage within the press come in feature pieces in national newspapers, in *The Sunday Times* of 12 April 1964. The representation therein is helpful, "Liverpool has always had a powerful local pride...this pride has been fed by its situation as an immigrant city with one-third Irish descent...Liverpool always lived in the uproarious seaport tradition, and early attempts at control produced a general rule that the pubs are licensed only for recorded music. Night-life became an affair of clubs – but 10 years ago, when the 'shebeens' were in their frantic heyday, the club business itself was out-of-hand. 'Shebeen' – an Irish word for drinking place – meant in Liverpool an old private house, provisionally licensed or unlicensed, dealing hooch, drugs, and violence. The shebeens made Liverpool something like an open city".<sup>352</sup> 'Irishness' is presented in a number of familiar manners, here. In turn, Liverpool's 'powerful local pride' (possibly exceptionalism) is presented as a consequence of the city's large immigrant population, with particular reference made to the Irish. Second, music, and the performance thereof, is prioritised as a key reason for the city being the way it is. Finally, 'Irish' is directly linked to matters that are presented as being morally or legally dubious. 'Irishness' in this regard, with regard to 'shebeens', is not presented as an

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<sup>351</sup> Oral testimony from Brian Jones, recorded by the author, 6 September 2017.

<sup>352</sup> 'The Age of the Scouse', *The Sunday Times*, (12 April 1964).

uplifting display of song and dance, but rather is directly tied to illegality; to ‘hooch, drugs, and violence’. Therefore, the features of Liverpool, the city, described in this manner are given Irish explanation. The somewhat seedy features that made the author of this piece take notice are both thoroughly Liverpool and, if not thoroughly Irish, then very close to.

*The Daily Express* provides one of the other few examples of the Mersey Beat movement being given an Irish tinge: “the Liverpool Sound is no more than an extension of rock ‘n’ roll, flavoured with Liverpool Irish and Liverpool Welsh and Liverpool’s climactic catarrh...here was one of the healthiest scenes in Liverpool. This earthy, sexual, savage sound was good.”<sup>353</sup> The inference here is fairly clear – that the musical Celts, coupled with the Liverpool accent, created something that was new and unique. The extent to which this kind of reflection is only apparent in the national newspapers (and not very many at that) is striking. It is clear that ‘Irishness’ was never a sole consideration – it was almost always paired with other factors, if not quite as an afterthought, but almost an obligatory requirement when talking about Liverpool – a city, undoubtedly, with a vast amount of Irish heritage.

There is an argument to be made, however, that much of the ‘Irishness’ influence was instead articulated through other means. The Liverpool accent, for example, was occasionally used as a conduit through which different explanations were put forward. The attempts to link it with Ireland are below; it was also used to explain the apparent Liverpudlian susceptibility to American music – as is covered in Chapter 3.

Liverpool’s accent is one of the most analysed by linguists due to its unique nature.<sup>354</sup> Its essence need not be too weightily examined for this work, that being the aim of linguists rather than historians. Nevertheless, the accent is both simultaneously instantly recognisable for most in the United Kingdom, and its history relatively muddy – beyond a general understanding that the Irish influx must have played a role in some way. The breadth of literature on this is considerable. At one end of the scale is a work like Ron Freethy’s *Made Up Wi Liverpool: A Salute to the Scouse Dialect*, a popular book aimed at a casual audience, wherein the claim that “immigrants...poured into Liverpool, especially from Ireland in the 1840s when the potato harvest failed there and Scouse definitely owes its wonderful lilt to the Irish influence...in most of Lancashire, the word

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<sup>353</sup> M. Winn, ‘Listen! This is earthy, savage and good!’ *Daily Express*, (7 October 1963).

<sup>354</sup> Knowles (1973); De Lyon (1981); Honeybone (2001); Sangster (2001) eg.

'door' is pronounced *dewar*, whilst in Scouse this would be a sing-song like *dar* and reveals a clear Irish link".<sup>355</sup> At the other end of the scale is something like Gerald Knowles' study of Scouse, which privileged the 'Irish' aspect in a manner that should be familiar. When discussing the (then) present state of Scouse for his PhD thesis published in the 1970s, Knowles suggested that, "Anglo-Irish became the non-prestige form, as opposed to the traditional North-Western English – presumably codified by other immigrants – which became the local standard. The two varieties have mixed in the course of the last hundred years, and in a rather interesting way. Prestige grammar, vocabulary and phonological structure have percolated downwards, and have imposed a surprising degree of uniformity on working-class speech".<sup>356</sup> Although critical of the evidence provided to support Knowles' thesis that Scouse could be traced almost immediately post-Famine influx, Belchem accords a degree of agreement with how the Scouse accent happened. Belchem suggests that there were two key factors that accelerated this process; first, that "once established as the vernacular of the central areas, 'slummy' scouse flourished in a nodal position at the heart of the Merseyside communications network and the main labour market. While residential distance from the centre was increasingly possible and desirable, everyday working contact with scouse was unavoidable".<sup>357</sup> Second, that the casual labour market created a *lingua franca* in which all, regardless of sectarian or religious affiliation, could participate.

The point of this section, therefore, is to consider whether the origins of the Scouse accent or identity were ever definitively identified as 'Irish' within the newspaper evidence, how to display the way in which the two terms intertwined and, particularly, whether the Scouse accent itself could be considered a marker of 'Irishness', if at all.

While there is little evidence that 'Irishness' was in itself used to explain the prominence of the Merseybeat phenomenon, there is evidence to suggest that the Liverpool accent was sometimes used as a synonym for it, in a manner that suggests the cultural legacy of 'Irishness' did play something of a role. At the outset, it should be made clear that the Liverpool accent will not be considered the logical consequence of Irish in-migration and influence on the city. The exact role that the Irish population

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<sup>355</sup> Freethy, *Made Up Wi Liverpool!*, p. 13.

<sup>356</sup> G. Knowles, *Scouse: The Urban Dialect of Liverpool*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>357</sup> Belchem, *Merseypride*, pp. 45-46.

played with regard to the accent is far from clear. Nevertheless, there is acceptance that the accent is in some way, if not consequentially and clearly, descended from 'Irish' roots in Liverpool. The crucial consideration here, should be how the accent was used to mark difference, the effect that it had on Liverpool music and, as a result, how it was used to 'explain' the Merseybeat phenomenon.

Mal Jefferson, upon being asked whether there was anything that marked the music out as being particularly influenced by Liverpool suggested, "no. Just the accent and the Americans found the accent cute. It lent itself because of the Irish twang inside the accent, it lent itself to me, a more country-ish kind of vowel".<sup>358</sup> The effect of the accent, therefore, on the popularity of Liverpool music, or at least as an explanation for its apparent uniqueness, can possibly be understood in these terms. The accent is often held up as being a key ingredient in explaining the popularity, in Britain and the United States, of the Merseybeat movement. Features in *DISC* in 1963, for example, explained the prevalence of American musical forms, but alongside the Liverpool accent. For example, "[the Beatles] wanted to play the uncompromising, rough, rocking music they admired on American records...but the music came out with a Liverpool accent, not just the words, but the whole performance",<sup>359</sup> and through an interview with Norrie Paramor, "basically I suppose these groups are inspired by American R 'n' B like the Liverpudlians. Their accent's quite a bit different though".<sup>360</sup> The accent, therefore, was a key distinctive feature that supposedly set Liverpool apart and is used to 'explain' the Merseybeat phenomenon. The final example from *DISC*, a feature written with the purpose of explaining the Liverpool Sound, put the accent at its centre, "but what IS [sic] the Liverpool Sound? For myself, as I found out, among the deep-rooted aisles of the Cavern...when you see the Beatles, or the Searchers, or the Big Three playing a package date, you still haven't heard the Liverpool Sound. You WON'T [sic] experience it until you visit one of the Liverpool clubs, where its true coarseness, plus a pronounced Liverpool accent, blends in with its setting". Missing from this, however, is any conception of the Liverpool accent being an Irish contribution to the musical flavour of Merseybeat. The accent is certainly noted and explained, but not given Irish explanation.

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<sup>358</sup> Oral testimony from Mal Jefferson, recorded by the author, 12 July 2017.

<sup>359</sup> *DISC*, 28 September 1963.

<sup>360</sup> *DISC*, 12 October 1963.

The recognition of the accent's importance continued in almost all of the other music newspapers. Ironically, Tony Jackson of the Searchers claimed that the Liverpool groups were all substantially different and that the only things that made them worthy of comparison were the accents and the fact they all came from Liverpool, "we believe that the biggest handicap for any group is sounding like another group. If we have anything in common with the other Merseyside outfits, it is simply that we come from the same area and have the same accents".<sup>361</sup> There is the desire to not be seen as the same as everyone else, and yet there is also the recognition by Jackson that the accent is/was something that united them. Tony Jackson was also quoted in another newspaper suggesting, having been asked whether the "coloured vocal sound came via the Merseyside accent? 'Yes, you find that kind of throaty sound and accent, nasal too. Maybe that's how we get it to sound like that'".<sup>362</sup> Jackson puts the accent right at the centre of what the 'Liverpool Sound' was and, if it is Irish in origin, this would seem like a key indicator of difference. Again, however, care should be taken to not combine the later work of linguists in identifying the origins of the Liverpool accent with contemporaneous accounts of the accent's importance to the Liverpool Sound. To do so would be to put words into the mouths of the people featured in these accounts.

Again, an entire feature on the Liverpool accent in a later edition of *Melody Maker* placed the successes of the Liverpool groups directly on the accent itself, "up until six months ago, an American, or at least mid-Atlantic accent, was an essential for a success-seeking popster. It used to be a winnerful world for them. Until the Beatles turned up with accents that were unmistakably Merseyside, even disguised under swathes of guitar sounds. It was the hoarse, flat Liverpool accent that gave Gerry Marsden his unique vocal delivery, and enabled him to chalk up two No 1 chart toppers in a row, with the Pacemakers. The same natural vocal sound touched the throats of Billy J Kramer with the Dakotas, and the drummer-vocalist Johnny Hutchinson with the Big Three and brought both record success".<sup>363</sup> The accent was featured as a key reason for the success of these Liverpool groups and, importantly, was used as a feature of authenticity of the music that was produced. There are other examples of how this worked, for example, "the Beatles, Gerry and the Pacemakers, Billy J Kramer...the names

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<sup>361</sup> *Hit Parade*, September 1963.

<sup>362</sup> *Melody Maker*, 23 March 1963.

<sup>363</sup> *Melody Maker*, 22 June 1963.



alone conjure up hysteric scenes. Mass hysteria, pounding music, Liverpool accents and stardom”.<sup>364</sup> Alongside the ‘hysteria’ and powerful music were the Liverpool accents, seemingly indivisible from the music itself and a key part of it.

This is made all the clearer when accusations of the accent being imitated in order to be presented as an ‘authentic’ Merseybeat group are revealed. Ray Ennis, of the Swinging Blue Jeans, made such an accusation in 1964, that, “you’d be surprised at the number of southern groups we meet who go to the trouble of actually trying to talk with Liverpool accents. ‘Course we can tell the phoneys from a mile off. But the local folk are often conned into believing that the group has just hurried down from Beatle-land”.<sup>365</sup> Brian Jones made a similar claim in interview, “everybody wanted a Liverpool band, you know...there were bands going out and being put on by agencies saying that they were from Liverpool so they’d get the work, you know. We’d go over, see a band advertised as Merseybeat, ask them where they were from and they’d speak to us in Liverpool accents. There was all that going on”.<sup>366</sup> The accent therefore gave a dint of authenticity to Liverpool groups.

The accent, therefore, was obviously a key consideration in marking Liverpool groups, and Liverpool, apart. Although later work has contributed to the understanding of the Liverpool accent being one that is heavily influenced by Irish manners of speaking – for example, “as a result of this immigration, as we will see, there are some similarities between Liverpool English’s phonological system and those of Irish Englishes”<sup>367</sup> – this is fundamentally not present in the contemporary music writing. Although this is unquestionably one aspect of the period that is presented as ‘exceptional’, it is not given Irish explanation. Rather, Liverpool’s accent is just allowed to stand as it is – a curious quirk of another Northern accent, rather than as a curiosity that was worthy of further explanation. This approach is understandable, music newspapers at the time may not have been interested in the phonetic roots of ‘Scouse’, but this argument falls away somewhat when the extent of other investigations and reflections on other matters of importance (such as Americanisation, or class) were made with such regularity. The absence of contemplations on the roots of Liverpool’s accent does not mean that such

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<sup>364</sup> *Hit Parade*, March 1964.

<sup>365</sup> *New Record Mirror*, 4 January 1964.

<sup>366</sup> Oral testimony from Brian Jones, recorded by the author, 6 September 2017.

<sup>367</sup> K.D. Watson, ‘Liverpool English’ in *Journal of the International Phonetic Association*, Volume 37, Issue 3, December 2007, p. 351.

roots do/did not exist, but they certainly were not used to explain one of the key features of that distinctive ‘Liverpool Sound’ even where that accent was one of the crucial factors in defining a difference that was clearly visible or, rather, audible.

### *Irishness – conclusions*

Far from being a key part of the evidence in this regard, the relative lack of any appreciation for “Irishness” being a key factor in the Merseybeat phenomenon is rather striking. That so much of the general Liverpool historiography seems to take the ‘Irish’ angle for granted, or just to assume that it is there, the manner in which it does not come through, particularly in the newspaper research, leads to the need to find, or try to find, an explanation for it. That it is a feature of the oral history evidence, however, could imply a retrospective explanation for what made the Merseybeat phenomenon what it was.

Although ‘Irishness’ is not present as a contemporary consideration within the music press, this is not to say that it was not considered at all. The role of the Irish within the history of Liverpool is not up for question; rather what might be is how applicable the catch-all explanation of ‘Liverpool = Irish’ is in the very different city of the post-war twentieth century. One explanation that might make sense is to question whether ‘Irishness’ is only ever reached for when Liverpool is in the news for reasons that would be considered negative. As explained earlier, the 1980s saw the city undergo a traumatic series of events through which the press attempted to explain and/or stigmatise the city by drawing upon its supposedly ‘emotional’ or ‘self-pitying’ nature. This clearly is not the case, here. The Merseybeat phenomenon was largely presented in positive terms and, although some documentary features, or articles, focussed on Liverpool’s disadvantageous social and economic situations, these mainly did so as a means of explaining why the city was producing music that had become nationally popular, not as a way of explaining why the city had fallen on hard times.

It would accord with the historiographical and research evidence that maybe ‘Irishness’ is not something that has been used to explain British characteristics, or phenomena, that are seen as positive.<sup>368</sup> Whether the research in this thesis accords with, or rejects, Belchem’s hypothesis is unclear. On the one hand, the most effective

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<sup>368</sup> Per Belchem and other writers such as Sean Campbell. See also press coverage such as Jonathan Margolis’ ‘Self Pity City’ piece in *The Sunday Times*, 28 February 1993.

categorisations of Liverpudlianism (if such a thing exists) have had a noticeably Irish hue. Belchem's own contention that the Liverpool-Irish were the foundation characters of the Scouser in Belchem's thesis shows this enough – with their associated health issues, casualism, and status as the caput mortuum. The writings of Margolis et al have, as established, used Irish frameworks to 'explain' the modern city, too. On the other hand, the fact that many of the interviewees depicted their 'Irishness' and its (vague) influence as a positive could suggest that Belchem's thesis is less applicable, though it is clear that 'Irishness' was far down the list of explanations for the phenomenon. The music itself was definitely not Irish – it was heavily influenced, copied, and styled on black American rock 'n' roll by working-class English men and boys. Therefore, class explanations and Americanisation came much easier to members of the press than did a vague notion of Liverpool's history with regard to Ireland. Perhaps, therefore, Belchem's contention that Irish explanations only tend to be used negatively rings true – where there was no motivation to provide Irish explanations, they were unnecessary.

That the oral history provided much more material is further evidence of this. That the interviewees, by and large, could all hark back to very clear examples of 'Irishness' in action suggests that it was much more of a local factor in day-to-day lives than it was on the highly popular and publicised nature of the Merseybeat music phenomenon. The very best that was achieved with regard to this, however, were fairly vague statements about the Irish influence being important rather than, for example, a series of clear instances where Irish heritage, societies, or events could draw clear lines of causation from them to the Merseybeat phenomenon. This research fits in with Marion Leonard's contention that Irishness, for her own subjects, had to be 'claimed'. 'Irishness', for the interviewees, would logically probably not be used in a negative manner. Though there is evidence of negativity being used to explain Merseybeat by interviewees (particularly when describing the city as a deprived place in which music was an escape, for example), with Irishness this would seem to make little sense. The negative characteristics concerning Liverpool that were given Irish foundation could hardly be applied to the Merseybeat phenomenon, which was anything but downbeat.

The limited examples, therefore, do little to suggest that 'Irishness' was a singularly crucial factor to the Merseybeat phenomenon at all. The evidence points to retrospective justification, rather than something that was clearly identifiable at the time. It should be said that the 'Irishness' of day-to-day life in Liverpool is fairly clear –

there were very obvious examples of Irish heritage being displayed from day to day – however the extent to which it either impacted, or was seen to have impacted, the Merseybeat phenomenon is contemporaneously limited. This is not to say that a vague sense of Irishness should be discarded as a contributory factor, instead it cannot be considered the main factor by any means. It therefore should be understood within a much wider framework of general cosmopolitanism; the focus of the next section through a case study of the Afro-Caribbean experience in Liverpool.

## **Section 2: The Afro-Caribbean Experience and Merseybeat**

There are fundamental questions to be addressed for this section: if cosmopolitanism is such a key feature for the ‘character’ of Liverpool, bearing in mind that as the twentieth century went on, Liverpool became less and less diverse then, with regard to the period being studied, what did the city look like in the 1960s and how much was the Merseybeat pop movement actually influenced by the city’s famous cosmopolitanism? The relatively recent inclusion of ethnicity in the national census makes precise measures of ethnic diversity in Liverpool at this time a difficult task. With regards to ethnicity, however, the modern city is one of the least diverse in the United Kingdom. The 2011 census showed for Liverpool that 88.9% of people considered themselves to be White British.<sup>369</sup> When compared to other cities, such as Manchester (66%); Birmingham (58%); and London (45%), Liverpool is (by 2011 standards) explicitly not diverse, at least with regard to ethnicity. Care should be taken to not apply 2011 standards to the 1960s, and also to not suggest that cosmopolitanism can only be understood with regard to race and ethnicity. Nevertheless, the city’s apparent cosmopolitanism has been used to explain the reasons behind how Liverpoolian groups produced the music that is so closely associated with the Merseybeat period so keenly. However, Liverpool’s relationship with race, particularly with people of Afro-Caribbean heritage, is far from simple. In the 1980s, a dedicated report on Liverpool’s race problem described the city’s racism as “uniquely horrific”. The Gifford Report therefore raises the question of how a potentially exceptional appreciation of black musical forms co-existed with a wider metropolitan culture that was geared against ethnic minority groups or indeed whether this racism existed in 1960s Liverpool. Although one must

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<sup>369</sup> <http://liverpool.gov.uk/media/9899/ethnicity-and-migration.pdf> [Accessed 3 January 2018].

acknowledge the chronological gap between the Liverpool of the 1960s and 1980s, these two instances are both born from the same city.

It is rarely questioned in the press why there was a dearth of black groups in Liverpool, despite the acknowledgment that the city had a large 'coloured' population. There are a number of wider accounts<sup>370</sup> of Liverpool's problematic relationship with race. As aforementioned, the Gifford Report's main contentions were a far cry from the cosmopolitan and welcoming recipient of black American music as depicted in the press coverage from the 1960s. Care should be taken to not compare two different eras – the Gifford Report was written in the 1980s. However, it is extremely unlikely that racism flourished out of nowhere in those twenty intermediate years.

Cosmopolitanism, being as central to his thesis on Liverpool Exceptionalism as it is, the main focus of Belchem's attention understandably comes down to the issues of race. In his most recent study, *Before the Windrush*, Belchem provides a clear explanation of the evolution of the city after the Second World War and further explains how the city's cosmopolitanness changed after this period. In the 1950s, Belchem claims that the city was actually something of a model for other British cities. Although not a beacon of unblemished racial and ethnic integration; he claims that organisations such as the Colonial Welfare Committee and the Stanley House Community Centre were well intentioned, but their all-white staff often veered into paternalism and an inability to satisfy the new arrivals as well as the Liverpool-born blacks. That being said, the fact that the city escaped the 1958 race riots, which took place most notably in Notting Hill and Nottingham, was held up as a means of showcasing the city's supposedly progressive stance on racial community issues even if, as Belchem claims, "Liverpool blacks were reluctant to vacate the relative security of the Granby Triangle with its networks of ethnic collective mutuality, shebeens, clubs and other compensatory delights".<sup>371</sup> The Granby Triangle, otherwise variously known as Liverpool 8, or more generally as Toxteth, was a key site of black Liverpoolian residence. Whilst the city council was praised for its policies towards racial issues at the time, Belchem nevertheless ensures to mention that division remained. Liverpool blacks, "eschewed the outer council estates favoured by the re-housed white working class...they

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<sup>370</sup> See Brown, *Dropping Anchor Setting Sail*; Frost, 'West Africans, Black Scousers and the colour problem in inter-war Liverpool'; Gifford, *Loosen the Shackles*.

<sup>371</sup> Belchem, *Before the Windrush*, p. 162.

remained distant (if not excluded) from the prosperity enjoyed (at least in the short term) by those living in close proximity to the new 'branch plant' industrial units on the city's outskirts."<sup>372</sup> Liverpool black people, therefore, even in a period where they were supposedly a model for racial and ethnic integration in Britain, still felt excluded from the white Liverpoolian mainstream. Belchem summarises by suggesting that the "critical reflections on the city's 'boom' years derive from hindsight. At the time, Liverpool was regarded as something of a success story".<sup>373</sup> This is a troublesome suggestion. The idea that racial tension is only discovered in hindsight does not imply that one had to work hard to find it, rather – relying on the vast number of testimonies collected by, for example, Jacqueline Nassy Brown – the experiences of Liverpool blacks were relegated or shifted aside in favour of the 'success story' narrative.

Liverpool 8 is the main site of popular black memory in the city. The creation of a single area in which the vast majority of black Liverpoolians lived, it is suggested, became de facto policy and was followed by housing authorities on the understanding that this was a particular area where ethnic minority families resided. Diane Frost has undertaken a number of studies on how this operated in practice, with private landlords and the local council "discriminating against black families, making it almost impossible for them to buy or rent outside of the 'Coloured Quarter'".<sup>374</sup> The city of the 1950s and 1960s was not one that made enormous strides on ethnic integration. Ramon 'Sugar' Deen, a musician from Liverpool speaking to Sara Cohen, was explicit in his description of the city, particularly his experiences in the North End in the 1950s: "no black families lived there and it was a totally racist part of the city. You couldn't walk from one end of the street to the other. Each day, going to school, coming home, bricks through the window, the whole bit...Liverpool is the most racist city I know...the North End of the city is still very racist".<sup>375</sup> Deen's picking out of the North End of the city accords with much of the literature on the topic. Liverpool 8 has variably been described as a place apart within Liverpool. Du Noyer described it as having a, "unique place within the civic psyche. For most of white Liverpool, this enclave up the hill, especially the central drag of Upper Parliament Street, was the dubious abode of coloured people. Liverpool is territorial at the best of times. Add in the extra complication of race and you have a

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<sup>372</sup> *Ibid*, 161-2.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid*, p. 161.

<sup>374</sup> Frost, 'Black and White 'Scouse' Identities' in Kirk, N., (ed.) *Northern Identities*, p. 204.

<sup>375</sup> Ramon Sugar Deen quoted in Cohen, *Beyond the Beatles*, p. 27.

virtual no-go zone”.<sup>376</sup> The Liverpool 8 experience, among others, is not one of cosmopolitan integration. Rather, as Belchem suggests, “Liverpool lacks a political culture and a historiographical tradition to incorporate its non-celtic in-migrants, the long-established presence of West Indians, Africans and Chinese notwithstanding”.<sup>377</sup> Backing this up, Wes Wilkie, the son of black Liverpoolian singer Derry, disclosed to Cohen that, “Liverpool [could be described] as not so much a ‘melting pot’, but as a patchwork of geographical areas distinguished by class, ethnicity, religion and a strong degree of territorialism”.<sup>378</sup> Cosmopolitanism and integration, therefore, apparently struggled to go hand-in-hand in twentieth century Liverpool.

As the 1950s turned into the 1960s, however, Belchem makes clear that the fig leaf of “spurious local rhetoric of harmonious relations and national pre-occupation with new immigrant arrivals” soon disappeared and that Liverpool was to be held up as an exemplar of how not to treat the progeny of migrants. The work of Stanley House was again praised, with reference to the building of a gymnasium with the help of funding that was the direct result of lobbying by Bessie Braddock MP, but the organisation itself warned of ‘Complacency on Race Relations’ in its annual report of the same name in January 1967.<sup>379</sup> By 1971, however, black youth unemployment reached 32.5%, compared to 19.5% for white youth.<sup>380</sup>

In 1968, a report from the Working Party of the Liverpool Youth Organisations Committee was hugely critical of how the city approached issues pertaining to racial and ethnic minorities. In its report, *Special but not Separate*, a particular focus was laid on the area known as Liverpool 8. The Working Party, it is claimed, applied a “critical edge to discussion of Liverpool’s vaunted pre-eminence in race relations”.<sup>381</sup> In it, it was claimed that a clear spatial divide emerged where, despite the good work that organisations such as Stanley House undertook, the bleakness of employment opportunities for young black adults was clear. The findings of the report are fairly stark, only 0.75% of 10,000 retail jobs were occupied by ‘coloured’ people, which dropped to 0.1% in the city centre – outlining the division between Liverpool 8 and the

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<sup>376</sup> du Noyer, *Wondrous Place*, p. 99.

<sup>377</sup> Belchem, *Merseypride*, p. 63.

<sup>378</sup> Cohen, *Beyond the Beatles*, p. 28.

<sup>379</sup> Belchem, *Before the Windrush*, p. 203.

<sup>380</sup> Figures quoted in J.N. Brown, ‘Black Liverpool, Black America, and the Gendering of Diasporic Space’, *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol 13, Vol 3, August 1998, p. 322.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid*, p. 204.

centre in this regard.<sup>382</sup> The report was most damning on the segregation outlined already:

In the Liverpool 8 area, they were taken for granted, but consciousness of their colour became extreme when they went outside the area...as in the city centre, so too in working-class districts, coloured youth felt particularly insecure. They tried to go out in groups especially with some white friends. They felt that any attempt to visit an all-white youth club was an open invitation to violence, and they were quite sure that when violence did break out between white and coloured, the police often discriminated against the coloured.<sup>383</sup>

The response to the report was, in Belchem's words, to "rest on its laurels, proud of its long record for 'colour-blind' policies". A report in the Guardian on the findings of the House of Commons Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration laid bare the typical reaction of the local Liverpoolian political leadership:

Employers were baffled, and trade unionists irritated, by the committee's energy in trying to uncover a problem which Liverpoolians emphatically deny exists...employers and unions agreed that they had received no complaint about discrimination in Liverpool and that if, as was suggested, coloured people felt they were less than welcome in some occupations, it could be that they were oversensitive.<sup>384</sup>

This mentality would abide in some of the interviewees and will be discussed in due course.

Alongside a physical separation, too, ran an ethnic and communitarian one. It is suggested, again by Frost, that a shared black identity was firstly, strongest at times of racial hostility and second, an inclusive and positive one that was used as a method to fight said oppression.<sup>385</sup> This would form the roots for the experience of what Jacqueline Brown would call the 'Liverpool born black' concept wherein those whom belonged to said ethnic identity existed apart from the commonly understood 'Scouse' frameworks. Going beyond the acceptance that Liverpool 8 was an area of black residence, the experiences of black people once they left Liverpool 8, by doing something as simple as going to the town centre, or going to school, or seeing a girlfriend, leave very little to the imagination. Diane Frost calls upon the experiences of black football fans, through a book about the former Liverpool player of Jamaican

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<sup>382</sup> In *Ibid*, p. 205. Reference to original document.

<sup>383</sup> Liverpool Youth Organisations Committee, *Special but not separate: a report of a working party of the Liverpool Youth Organisations Committee on the situation of young coloured people in Liverpool*, (1968).

<sup>384</sup> *The Guardian*, 28 March 1969.

<sup>385</sup> Kirk, *Northern Identities*, pp. 204-205.



heritage, John Barnes, to explain. Quoting a black Liverpool fan's experience of attending matches in the 1960s, he suggested, "[you would] spend a good part of your time looking about you to see who was shouting this or throwing that or trying to pick a fight. I stopped going. I found that it was an intolerable situation to find yourself in, when you were prone to racial abuse from all sections of the ground, from *both* sets of supporters. It just defeated the point of going there".<sup>386</sup> This aspect of the black experience in Liverpool should be given appropriate emphasis. The consequence of Liverpool's racial segregation, whether intended or not, was to make Liverpool 8 an area of appreciable difference, but also to make the areas outside of Liverpool 8 ones of extreme hostility towards Liverpudlian black people. The image for a Liverpool-born black person at this time is one of semi-enforced segregation through discriminatory housing policies, coupled with hostility should one move beyond the confines of a particular area at the top of Upper Parliament Street. That Liverpool had a positive reputation with regard to racial and ethnic integration at all is, therefore, a point of considerable contention.

In popular memory the 1950s were a period of attempted reconciliation in Liverpool, and the 1960s were not. The experiences of Liverpudlian blacks in the city were, throughout both periods, however, decidedly more circumspect. The Working Party's conclusion on the state of Liverpool's ethnic and racial atmosphere is interesting to note:

We have come to believe that the long-established myth in Liverpool of non-discrimination between people of different racial characteristics, however well-meaning in intention, disguises a lamentable indifference and lack of understanding. Within the areas where considerable numbers of coloured people are living there is some overt hostility, but hostility is more evident in all-white down-town areas; in middle-class areas prejudice is expressed by indifference. In this situation, especially considering the publicity given to overt racial prejudice in other parts of the country, there are the seeds of conflict which we believe will grow unless steps are urgently and deliberately taken to encourage real integration.<sup>387</sup>

The Working Party's conclusion was prophetic – their claim of 'seeds of conflict' growing out of racial discrimination in Liverpool arguably manifested in the Toxteth riots of 1980. Perhaps the most notable consequence of this entire situation was the

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<sup>386</sup> D. Hill, *Out of His Skin: The John Barnes Phenomenon* (London: WSC Books Limited, 1989) quoted in Frost, 'Black and White Scouse Identities' p. 213.

<sup>387</sup> Liverpool Youth Organisations Committee, *Special but not separate*, (1968).

creation of the “Liverpool-born black” identity, explained by Jacqueline Nassy Brown, that arose in response to the discriminatory policies of the Liverpoolian political leadership and the discriminatory attitudes of ordinary Liverpoolians. ‘Scouse’, per Frost, is or has been an identity that has deep class permutations, but also is/was “an insular and close inclusive category that has been used to distinguish those born in Liverpool from those inside, and to distinguish white working-class Liverpoolians from black working-class Liverpoolians *inside* Liverpool. Such exclusion, which has been informed by broader historical conditions, has contributed in part to the position of black people in Liverpool today”.<sup>388</sup> Adding to this, Brown: “invisibility is the fundamental condition that [Liverpool-born black] subjectivity speaks to and against. As a theme, it refers to [Liverpool-born blacks’] intrinsically connected experiences as local and racial subjects”.<sup>389</sup> Exclusion and invisibility, therefore, are key factors in the creation of this Liverpool-born black identity. The issues discussed in this section already provide an idea of the typical experience of the Liverpoolian-born black. There is evidence that these designations spread, too, to music. A sense of apartness within the black community is clear.

Finally, beyond the simple geographic division that Liverpool 8 engendered, however, was a cultural one. It should be clear that different racial and ethnic neighbourhoods would result in competing cultural values and experiences and Liverpool 8, too, came to represent an ‘edge’ within the city, a space where experiences were sought. For Belchem, the area he describes as the “surrounding Rialto district (beyond the purview of the white middle-class paternalists cocooned in Stanley House) attracted pleasure and sensation-seeking whites. Home of the black community, L8 at night acquired a cosmopolitan and bohemian reputation which black entrepreneurs were quick to exploit through suitable mark-ups for after-hours drinking and early morning taxi rides”.<sup>390</sup> Liverpool 8 was a crucial area for production and admiration of the music produced therein. Jacqueline Brown, for example, suggested that, “blacks locate the Beatles cultural roots elsewhere, decrying their invisibility in so doing. [Brown’s] own friends’ positivity recoiled at any reference to the Beatles”<sup>391</sup>, before relying upon a response to Ferdinand Dennis, which is reproduced below in full:

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<sup>388</sup> Frost, ‘Black and White Scouse Identities’, p. 198.

<sup>389</sup> Brown, *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail*, p. 92.

<sup>390</sup> *Before the Windrush*, p. 173.

<sup>391</sup> *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail*, p. 155.

The Beatles? We got no time for the Beatles 'round here. They're just another example of the white music industry ripping off black music. Where do you think the Beatles learnt their craft? They come from up Penny Lane way. There are no nightclubs up there. They learnt it round here, in Liverpool 8. John and Paul were taught to play the guitar by a Trinidadian guy, Woodvine [sic - n.b. this is most likely a mishearing – Lord Woodbine, however, was a popular Liverpool performer]. He used to own a nightclub that played Stateside music. He was a musician himself. John and Paul used to hang around him. That's where they picked up their style from. But nobody ever mentions Woodvine [sic]. Nobody! When Woodvine [sic] opened another nightclub he invited them to the opening. They didn't go, they were too big to know him then. So we 'round here don't have any time for the bloody Beatles.<sup>392</sup>

This frustration is clear. It seemed to be perfectly well accepted that the Beatles, and other Merseybeat musicians, relied heavily on the music of black Americans. The methods by which they came to see this 'black' music being performed, however, is not so clear. The frustration explained above is representative of the themes of marginalisation and feeling of being ignored that are so fundamental to Brown's Liverpool-born black formulation. The Cunard Yank framework, to be explained further in Chapter Three, is in itself problematic. With that being said, however, the degree to which this frustration was borne by all black Liverpoolians is unclear. As will be examined later in this section, there undoubtedly was/is frustration at the relegation of black musicians to the margins of the history of Merseybeat, but the strength of the above testimony is possibly exceptional.

Overall, therefore, the relationship that the city had with its supposed cosmopolitanism is extremely complicated. Privileged in historical discourse, it is clear that, in particular by following Belchem in *Windrush* and Brown in *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail*, that the city was not the model of racial relations that had been claimed at various points. Cosmopolitanism, of course, hints at an acceptance of that cosmopolitanism, not strict spatial segregation and discrimination in employment opportunities. As Belchem suggests in the conclusion to his section on 'Cosmopolitan Liverpool' in *Liverpool 800*, "outside L8 Liverpool was falling behind nascent multicultural Britain, left stranded by the ebb-tide of imperial trade. As the 'beat city' transmogrified into the 'beaten city', the characteristics that had once established Liverpool as beguilingly unique now set it apart in a darker, more malevolent way...for the long-established black community, the pervasive distress and deprivation were

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<sup>392</sup> Dennis, *Behind the Frontlines: Journey into Afro-Britain*, (London 1988) pp. 57-8.

compounded by discrimination...its 'cosmopolitan' heritage notwithstanding, Liverpool was thus neither role model nor front-runner for the multicultural Britain of the twenty-first century".<sup>393</sup> The purpose of this section is not to consider whether Liverpool was indeed a role model for twenty-first century Britain. Indeed, the broader questions on the experience of black Britons are not for this thesis and have been effectively explored elsewhere.<sup>394</sup> The focus, instead, is on how this spatial segregation affected the lives of the musicians in question, whether this divide clearly affected the production of music, and the popular representations of cosmopolitanism, to the extent that it was represented, within popular discourse/media. The next two sections, therefore, will focus on how the experience of black Liverpoolians impacted the Merseybeat movement, and the experiences of those people within the city itself, and within the music scene.

### Liverpool 8 and Spatial Segregation

All of the interviewees acknowledged the racial divide in Liverpool that manifested itself with the existence of the Liverpool 8 district. The divide is beyond question – it existed and was clearly acknowledged to have existed. Sometimes referred to as Toxteth, or Granby Ward, or 'the area at the top of Upper Parliament Street', the nomenclature matters little, other than to make clear that there was a clear area in which it was understood that black people lived. To answer the final question of the above section first, press coverage at the time rarely asked the pertinent question about why there was so little representation of black artists covering what they agreed was black American music. One of the few that did understandably came from Bill Harry in *Mersey Beat*, being familiar with the layout and demographics of the city:

The current trend in the States lies with coloured American vocal groups and if similar groups on Merseyside were given a decent chance they could produce the sound of '64. In the Upper Parliament district of Liverpool there have been many colourful outfits. The majority of them have disbanded due to the many difficulties that face them. Apart from the colour problems there is no-one who is prepared to give them a chance to work before audiences<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> Belchem and MacRaild, 'Cosmopolitan Liverpool' in *Liverpool 800*, p. 388.

<sup>394</sup> See J. Proctor (ed.) *Writing Black Britain, 1948-98: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2006), P. Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*, (London: Routledge, 2002) and more recently, D. Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History*, (London: Macmillan, 2016) amongst many others.

<sup>395</sup> *Mersey Beat* – October 24 – November 7 1963.

Referring directly to the 'Upper Parliament' area of Liverpool that was also known as Liverpool 8 or Toxteth, Harry emphasises that music in Liverpool was not the sole experience of young white men, yet one look at the representation of Liverpool in the national musical culture seemed to show exactly that. This is the extent of introspection from the press on this issue, however. The questioning of why Liverpool's Merseybeat phenomenon was almost entirely white was largely absent from the national music press.

*Who Put the Beat in Merseybeat*, a television programme broadcast in 1996, confirmed the Liverpool 8 paradigm. In it, a number of testimonies support the thesis of that part of the city being something of a place apart, but simultaneously a key space towards which young, musical Liverpoolians would gravitate. Joe Flannery, an agent, recalled his own experience of coming from the North end of the city and being told, "by various people of your family, 'don't go down the south end, don't go down Parliament Street and go down here, there' ...they pinpointed, 'don't go down by the Rialto!'. Well I went".<sup>396</sup> The Rialto, burned to the ground in the riots of 1981, was a key part of the history of black residents of Liverpool 8 – a meeting point and a frame of reference for where the area of Liverpool 8 began. Steve Aldo, a mixed-race member of a number of different Liverpool groups, suggested that, "Liverpool 8 was always the magnet. The club scene was always a magnet, similar I'd imagine to somewhere like Harlem, for people from all over the city".<sup>397</sup> This does not, therefore, provide a picture total apartness and separation but, for the music scene at least, instead gives one of a thriving local scene that attracted music fans and performers of all types. Indeed, a series of sequenced shots in that programme that consisted of a number of contributors listing the different types of music available in the large number of different Liverpool 8 clubs, "African music, Carribean music, harmony, jazz, calypso, jive..." ends with Ray Ennis of the Swinging Blue Jeans claiming that, "[it] put a big influence on any up-and-coming musicians in the city. Out of that, if you can imagine, this big pot of boiling music, I think that this is where the Liverpool Sound came from".<sup>398</sup> Again, this does not sound like a space that was exclusive for and restrictive, but one that had its own distinct character, but was fairly open for anyone who wanted to attend. Faron Ruffley backed this up in an

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<sup>396</sup> *Who Put the Beat in Merseybeat*, Granada 1996: <http://www.bfi.org.uk/films-tv-people/4ce2b7f1799a5>.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*

interview conducted for this research. When asked whether or not it was true that black Liverpoolians from Liverpool 8 did not come into the city centre, he reacted with surprise, “you’re joking! I used to go to Upper Parliament Street. John [Lennon] took me to where he used to play. Forget the name of the bloody club. The Chants – we were the first group to back them...they were Scousers, that’s what they were.”<sup>399</sup>

That being said, the interviews conducted for this research contain testimony that confirms the relationship between the Merseybeat and the spatial aspect of Liverpool in the post-war period. The majority of the interviews approach this issue by recognising that racial discrimination was undoubtedly a problem in Liverpool at the time. They do not, however, attempt to draw a link between their own experiences and general racial discrimination that they saw outside of the musical sphere. It should be noted that of the interviewees, only Ozzie Yue and Ramon Deen belong to ethnic minorities. Faron Ruffley, whilst being keen to emphasise his view that “they [black Liverpoolians] were Scousers” recounted a saying from his youth that “we used to say what’s black at one end, yellow at the other end and a mile long? Upper Parliament Street!”<sup>400</sup> a reference to the fact that Chinatown is found at the bottom end of Upper Parliament Street in the town centre, and Liverpool 8 near the top. There are examples of the interviewees discussing their own upbringings with reference to race. Picking up on an earlier point, Paul du Noyer, the music journalist, described his childhood in terms that made Liverpool seem exceptionally uncosmopolitan, contrary to the image put forward in some quarters:

I grew up in North Liverpool...I was utterly unaware of Liverpool having any black population...only later, by the time I got to my teens, I never spoke to a black person until I was 16...there were no single black, brown or yellow boys in my, obviously by definition no Jewish kids, nothing in my school. So, in a sense there was no race problem because there was no other race to have a problem with.<sup>401</sup>

Confirming the spatial segregation described above, du Noyer suggested that he experienced little racism due to the lack of contact with other races. It does, however, confirm the notion of North Liverpool being an area where there was very little black presence. It is therefore perhaps the case that cosmopolitanism had to be sought. If there were no ethnic minorities within the various enclaves of the city, then it was

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<sup>399</sup> Oral testimony from Faron Ruffley, recorded by the author, 6 September 2017.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>401</sup> Oral testimony from Paul Du Noyer, recorded by the author, 18 February 2016.

entirely feasible that one would not encounter any, unless the effort were made to go to places like Liverpool 8. Du Noyer's contention of North Liverpool being Irish was referred to in Section 1 of this chapter, but crucial here is the further information that he not only did not encounter any other races, but had no idea that they even existed – suggesting not just a lacking of cosmopolitanism but, rather, reinforcing the idea that cosmopolitanism had to be actively discovered in some areas of the city.

One of the interviewees said much the same as du Noyer as above, providing again an example of the way in which spatial segregation worked. This interviewee, however, was clear about how racism operated in the city, “if you lived in Liverpool 8 there were lots of black people. If you lived in Scotland Road there were virtually no black people because they didn't like them and didn't feel comfortable. There was still racism in terms of, you know, people began to get better about black people in the 60s. I remember hearing my father say ‘nigger’ on lots of occasions and then one day he just stopped altogether because he realised it wasn't right”.<sup>402</sup> This interviewee, therefore, clearly contradicted du Noyer's testimony – the absence of encounters between different races does not eliminate racism, merely hides it, or moves it indoors. Kingsize Taylor provided an example of the ‘Liverpool-born black’ issue alluded to above where he claimed that:

In Liverpool the worst thing that could happen were these so-called mixed marriages because they...if you ask Steve Aldo he'll tell you the same thing, when you have to want of a better word, a half-breed, he doesn't belong to anybody. ‘Cos now the blacks don't like him because he's not black and the white don't like him because he's not white.<sup>403</sup>

It should, first of all, be made clear here that Taylor was not espousing these beliefs himself, but attempting to explain the mentality that abounded at the time.

Nevertheless, it puts in very clear terms the way in which different aspects of Liverpudlian culture collided. On the one hand, a resolute determination to play black American music, on the other a prominent mixed-race Liverpudlian musician suffering from racial discrimination.

On a similar topic, Ramon “Sugar” Deen, who was involved in early iterations of The Chants, and other black Liverpool groups such as the Valentinos, was brutally clear about his experiences as a young black man in Liverpool: “when I was courting my wife,

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<sup>402</sup> Oral testimony, recorded by the author, name withheld.

<sup>403</sup> Oral testimony from Ted ‘Kingsize’ Taylor, recorded by the author, 10 January 2017.

she lived near Brownlow Hill, Drawbridge Street. Behind that is the bull ring. You couldn't go near there if you were black. Couldn't walk through that block. They'd be shouting "niggers!" and all come. So me, Tony, my wife or girlfriend, and her friend (who was Tony's girlfriend), whenever we'd walk them home after a night at the Rialto or the pictures or something, when we got to Mount Pleasant, they'd tell us to turn back. Sometimes I'd insist. Whenever I got to Brownlow Hill, "niggers!". They'd come running, but they could never catch any of us".<sup>404</sup> Deen's experiences are crucial to understanding these formulations. The spatial divide, therefore, was a real one with real consequences and not, as suggested, the unspoken acknowledgment that different races lived in different places – it consisted of hostility, attempted (and sometimes actual) violence, and clear racism. Far from the experiences of du Noyer, a man with Irish heritage from the North of the city, Deen's are of hostility and abuse.

Deen's take on Liverpool's apparent cosmopolitanism are further instructive. Upon being asked whether the city was indeed cosmopolitan, he replied, "it was, but racism was rife. Even to the present day, some shops you go into. But that's Liverpool. It was rife. Even jobs. I had white friends, obviously. They say, 'you remember them days you could walk out of one job into another, plenty of work around?'. [Expresses surprise]. I was 16/17, go 'any vacancies?'. 'No'. My friend would go in: 'any vacancies?'. 'When can you start?'. It was always like that. Some of my friends would go 'stick your fucking job up your arse', like that! It was cosmopolitan, but as I say, that was there you know".<sup>405</sup> Deen, therefore, drives fairly directly at this idea of cosmopolitanism – namely that a place can be cosmopolitan in name, and in crude population analysis, but that the relationships between people are of paramount importance, too.

There is an important caveat to this issue. When questioned, every interviewee, bar one, insisted that they recalled no instances of hostility towards black people within the music scene, *from musicians*. That one instance was recalled by Brian Jones, who said that he, "had seen a few dodgy race riots going on. I remember once at a social club, at a youth club. This thing had been going on for weeks where you'd have white and black people in there on either side of the hall. Things started to get a bit out of hand, with skirmishes and fights. I remember one fella ran towards the stage and he got stabbed in the back. We ran towards the dressing room and locked the door whilst all

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<sup>404</sup> Oral testimony from Ramon Deen, recorded by the author, 14 March 2018.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*



this was kicking off. It was blacks against whites in this room”.<sup>406</sup> Jones’ example aside, Deen backs up the main suggestion, here. Upon being asked whether there was more acceptance in the music scene, his response was, “yeah. Because a lot of them white musicians were kind of in awe at the talent of the black musicians. They’d want you to be involved with them. Or you’d walk in somewhere where they’re on and the first thing, the guy on the mic, says, ‘oh we’ve got Sugar Deen!’ ...some musicians [were] envious that you were ahead and they weren’t. Most musicians didn’t find that kind of racism in the music scene”.<sup>407</sup> This intersection of the racial attitudes of Liverpudlians and the attitudes of musicians could provide an effective answer to one of the key questions for this section – how did the ‘cosmopolitan’ music scene interact with the not so cosmopolitan rest of the city? Deen’s confirmation of Jones’ thesis seems to back up the central point, that there was a level of contradiction within the city. On the one hand, Deen recalled many an afternoon/evening/night spent with white musicians from other parts of the city, and on the other, recalls being chased out of areas on Brownlow Hill for being black.

Despite the protestations of a number of the interviewees, claiming that they (for example, explained in the following paragraph), “never had a problem with black people”, Liverpool’s spatial segregation and Merseybeat intersected in one particular way – the reluctance of black musicians/music fans to venture into Liverpool city centre. Du Noyer again recalled, “up the hill and past those cathedrals in Liverpool 8. That is, some people call it the ghetto, the black lads you sometimes see coming down the hill, that’s where they live. But we never saw black lads further than in a club called the Mardi Gras at the bottom of Mount Pleasant”.<sup>408</sup> Frankie Connor put it in identical terms:

I remember 64/5 at the Cavern and there weren’t many black faces at the Cavern, there just weren’t. Up at Hope Hall, later became the Everyman, and a sink club ‘round the corner. Played both venues in Hardman Street – more black faces there. Near Toxteth, Parliament Street. It was almost like they wouldn’t come into town, a bit further down. I never had any problems with them at all.<sup>409</sup>

This therefore provides a clear acknowledgment of the racial divisions within the city. Not only was there a clear spatial aspect, namely that black people were largely

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<sup>406</sup> Oral testimony from Brian Jones, recorded by the author, 6 September 2017.

<sup>407</sup> Oral testimony from Ramon Deen, recorded by the author, 14 March 2018.

<sup>408</sup> Oral testimony from Paul du Noyer, recorded by the author, 18 February 2016.

<sup>409</sup> Oral testimony from Frankie Connor, recorded by the author, 4 October 2015.

confined to Liverpool 8, but those very same people were reluctant to enter zones of perceived white domination. Ramon Deen is instructive on this issue, too. When the 'no further than the Mardi Gras' formulation was put to him, he responded with incredulity, "[we] couldn't get in [to the Cavern]. Couldn't get into any of the clubs in the city. You mentioned the Mardi Gras...nah! [Question as to whether this was a racial issue] Yeah. Unless you were well-known...it was only some years later that I could get into the Blue Angel, the Mardi and that. As I say, we couldn't get in the Cavern".<sup>410</sup> The puzzlement from the white interviewees was similarly instructive. Their own lack of experience and contact with racism possibly came from a position of acceptance and an inability to understand that their own personal acceptance of ethnic minorities did not automatically guarantee that everyone else outside of that particular scene was similarly accepting.

Nevertheless, each of the interviewees presented the music scene as being far more accepting of ethnic minorities than the rest of the city as a whole. Whilst black Liverpudlians were clearly reluctant to enter the city centre, this was often explained as being their own problem. Mal Jefferson, for example, upon being asked whether black people were reluctant to go into town, said, "that's exactly it. They had issues but we didn't. There were a lot of black seamen and Chinese".<sup>411</sup> This creates further issues, of course, but from the point of view of the other interviewees, there were no problems to be had. Taylor described how "when the ethnics, whether they're Chinese or blacks or whatever, when they come together, used to come down to the Cavern, they weren't black anymore, they were just one of the lads, you know. I think that was a great thing".<sup>412</sup>

Instructively, Connor described the way in which "black faces were not very prevalent until '66 one night. Ben E King was on – people I hadn't seen before. They came with their friends. Never had any problem with them. They were not around early days – maybe they thought that they'd keep away from us. Never felt it [hostility] at any time. Black lads in groups, just friends and people to me".<sup>413</sup> That they were "just friends and people" to him cannot be questioned, but his testimony aligns with Deen's – that it took a while for black musicians to be accepted in these environments. Whilst he

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<sup>410</sup> Oral testimony from Ramon Deen, recorded by the author, 14 March 2018.

<sup>411</sup> Oral testimony from Mal Jefferson, recorded by the author, 12 July 2017.

<sup>412</sup> Oral testimony from Ted 'Kingsize' Taylor, recorded by the author, 10 January 2017.

<sup>413</sup> Oral testimony from Frankie Connor, recorded by the author, 4 October 2015.

personally harboured no ill will, he very clearly recognised at the time, and looking back in hindsight that there was a distinct lack of black faces in the clubs he attended.

Mal Jefferson went on to describe his relationship with several black musicians, but particularly Derry Wilkie in the following terms: “there was never this barrier or anything. We’d all eat together, booze together. There was never any problem with that...he basically did Little Richard but he did it in such a way to make it entertaining and a bit of a fool of himself. It was only because he was with me and our band – if anyone came up to him. If anyone came to fight we’d have a fight. He was always nervous about going into a place with no blacks in it, you know”.<sup>414</sup> That the fact of black exclusion, absence, and unease were recognised and commented upon seems to bely the repeated suggestions that each interviewee never had any issue with black people. True this most likely is/was, it only further underlines the division within the city.

The above three examples are representative of other testimonies. Each interviewee was aware of the segregation of black Liverpoolians and yet all, bar one, claimed that they themselves never harboured any issues when they did share social spaces with black Liverpoolians. There was, however, a tendency to shift the impetus back onto the black Liverpoolians themselves, as displayed in the Liverpool Youth Organisations Committee report outlined above. One interviewee suggested that, “a lot of the black community, I don’t know whether I’m speaking right or not, sometimes brought a lot of it on themselves because they’d have a chip on their shoulder. I never had any problem with the black community”.<sup>415</sup> In these terms it becomes clear how problems could arise. To revisit Jefferson’s words: “they had issues, but we didn’t”. Care should of course be taken to not read too much into what Jefferson said, but it does echo the reaction described above – this is not to say that Jefferson himself thought that black people in Liverpool were being oversensitive, or that he thought less of them in any way (the opposite is true) but it *is* clear how this kind of misunderstanding can cause a festering resentment over time. That being said, the attitudes described make the wider questions about Liverpool in this period far clearer. There exist, among the interviewees not named Ramon Deen, two co-existing manners of thought that on the one hand straightforwardly accept the fact of black American inspiration on their own

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<sup>414</sup> Oral testimony from Mal Jefferson, recorded by the author, 12 July 2017.

<sup>415</sup> Oral testimony, recorded by the author, name withheld.

music, and on the other reject any possibility that there were ever any issues concerning race in the Liverpool scene of the 1960s.

The question, therefore, is how did a movement that has been linked heavily with cosmopolitan attitudes and that did aspire to performing and practising black American music result in its most popular iteration being overwhelmingly dominated by white men? On the one hand, the common story that young Liverpudlians had greater exposure to foreign forms of music which probably gave them a wider purview than those that never left Liverpool itself should be considered. The Cunard Yank story, however much it is based in mythology, clearly imprinted the belief, at the very least (as opposed to anything based in fact), that the city was more predisposed towards black American musical forms. This, in itself, can partially explain how the city's white youth became obsessed with this music. It does not, on the other hand, explain the marginalisation of the city's black experience. The appropriation of black musical forms by white musicians is, of course, neither a phenomenon that could be considered unique to Liverpool nor is it one that is without historical precedent. As mentioned in the Literature Review, the Elvis Presley experience (amongst others) provides clear evidence of how it would be perfectly possible to simultaneously laud the influence of artists like Chuck Berry and Little Richard on oneself personally, whilst also dismissing the lived experiences of black Liverpudlian peers. Of Hamilton's three explanations for this marginalisation, the "Great Man" theory seems the most appropriate – where artists like Bob Dylan and the Beatles were lauded as totally original creators with zero reference to black influence at worst, and at best with black artists relegated to simple source material.<sup>416</sup>

As also aforementioned, the lack of black artists achieving national success at this time should be given a wider, national explanation. It is not the sole fault of Liverpool that no black artists achieved national fame – although the marginalisation that took root in early lives has to be considered. The experiences of musicians such as Deen and the Chants were representative of "a multitude of recordings commercially released by British soul acts throughout the 1960s which failed to connect with the market but which were nevertheless rooted in the lived experiences of black British

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<sup>416</sup> N.B. The chronological aspect of the Beatles' work must be acknowledged. The above is not to say that the Beatles were not original per se, however.

musicians”.<sup>417</sup> The lack of national success, it is argued, came down to “institutionalised racism in the media industries (especially) with regard to television), a lack of clear promotional strategy within the recording industry for black artists during this period, and inertia within UK recording studios (primarily controlled by major labels) which meant that British soul artists were unable to compete in terms of production values and musicianship in relation to soul recordings emanating from the US”.<sup>418</sup>

It is exceptionally difficult to separate the city where people like Ramon Deen, many of whom have not had the platform to share their experiences,<sup>419</sup> from the music-creating city that exists in popular memory. Though each interviewee spoke persuasively about their own revulsion at what happened in Liverpool in the 1960s (and earlier), their testimonies still exhibit a clear awareness of it taking place. The simple fact of black exclusion from the sites that would become iconic in the Merseybeat mythology (the Cavern and so on) clearly represents black exclusion from the Merseybeat movement on a local scale. If, per Connor, it was only by 1966 that black faces started appearing at these venues, this was far too late for the Merseybeat movement writ large, which had most stopped receiving national attention by 1965. Although there were national obstacles to black groups succeeding – the only black British artist to reach number one between 1960 and 1965 was Shirley Bassey, for example – the experience of the Liverpool groups must be given Liverpool context. It was not the case that they were wildly popular and accepted in Liverpool before succumbing to national barriers – the barriers were, in their first instance, local.

Analysing Liverpool’s exceptionalism on this issue will be extremely difficult. The fact that there are no official figures on racial discrimination, for example, is the most obvious hurdle in the way. The introduction of the Race Relations Act in 1965 was the first attempt to tackle discrimination of this kind in the United Kingdom, but it was certainly an effort to address these issues on a nationwide scale. What can be suggested here is that there is a substantial clash between how Liverpool was presented in the press and how the city actually existed. On the one hand, the seafaring, cosmopolitan

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<sup>417</sup> R. Strachan, ‘Britfunk: Black British Popular Music, Identity and the Recording Industry in the Early 1980s’ in J. Stratton and N. Zuberi (eds), *Black Popular Music in Britain Since 1945*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014) p. 69.

<sup>418</sup> Stratton and Zuberi, p. 70.

<sup>419</sup> Deen was also interviewed for the “Unseen L8” project, where he expanded on his perceptions of racism in the city: <https://vimeo.com/123557749>.

Liverpool, the city where the young working class absorbed black American sounds with very few qualms. On the other, stories of imbedded racial discrimination that fed directly through into the music scene.

### *Cosmopolitanism and Effect on Music*

The most prominent black Liverpool group at this time were the Chants. Led by Chris and Eddie Amoo, they come up repeatedly in the oral history testimony and in the wider historiography.<sup>420</sup> Examinations of the period also suggest a thriving scene in the Liverpool 8 area that it is suggested, in some quarters, played a key role in influencing and creating the Merseybeat period. For example, an ITV documentary broadcast in 1996, *Who Put the Beat in Merseybeat*, that focussed solely on the black experience in Liverpool (and as a consequence, in Liverpool 8), provided an argument with regard to how the city's cosmopolitanism fed into this phenomenon.

When pushed to consider the number of non-white groups in Liverpool, most of the interviewees fell back on the Chants. Per Faron Ruffley, "the Chants – we were the first group to back them...they were Scousers, that's what they were...the Chants [were] the only black band I ever heard and I thought they were incredible".<sup>421</sup> Chris Huston, upon being asked about the extent of musical success from Liverpool 8, suggested much the same: "the Chants had a following but it was, looking back, were they a novelty or a greatly appreciated band? They're appreciated more in retrospect than they were at the time".<sup>422</sup> Finally, Mal Jefferson was effusive with praise for the Chants, "there were only two black groups I can think of. The Chants and there was the Champions I think it was...the Chants we backed, the Mastersounds backed them first in Stanley House in Upper Parliament Street in 60/61...they were like an American doo-wop group but better. They were tremendous, the amount of detail they went into with the five voices".<sup>423</sup>

The singular success of the Chants (although the degree of success was always primarily local, paled in comparison to the other nationally popular Liverpool groups, and said mainstream success was actually later found when the group was reconstructed as The Real Thing) is the background against which the Merseybeat

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<sup>420</sup> See Du Noyer, *Wondrous Place*, pp. 84, 112.

<sup>421</sup> Oral testimony from Faron Ruffley, recorded by the author, 6 September 2016.

<sup>422</sup> Oral testimony from Chris Huston, recorded by the author, 3 November 2016.

<sup>423</sup> Oral testimony from Mal Jefferson, recorded by the author, 12 July 2017.

movement should be understood. It is not one, therefore, of widespread acceptance of immigration and ethnic minorities. Yet this was very rarely brought up in any of the press coverage. That coverage tended to present Liverpool as a cosmopolitan, outgoing city whose cosmopolitanism led to a higher propensity to be influenced by the musical forms of, in particular, black Americans. Bob Wooller's piece was the first identifiable example of the construction of the Merseyside music boom as being the reorganised and rebooted work of black Americans. Writing about the Beatles, he said:

I think the Beatles are No.1 because they resurrected original style rock 'n' roll music, the origins of which are to be found in American negro singers. They hit the scene when it had been emasculated by figures like Cliff Richard and sounds like those electronic wonders the Shadows and their many imitators.<sup>424</sup>

Wooller identifies the primary source of inspiration for Liverpool groups as 'American Negro' singers. This observation took place at least two years before the Liverpool groups reached the national mainstream and therefore this idea was established at a very early point in the phenomenon's history. The extent to which it was disseminated is less clear, however, and on this point Wooller was considerably ahead of the curve. What is noticeable, however, is that the influence of these groups was kept at arm's length. There was never any discussion of the extent to which cosmopolitan influences came from within Liverpool itself. Any reference to black influence, was in these formulations, always depicted as being one brought over by African-Americans. The idea of cosmopolitan being an internal framework is fairly non-existent – there is little reference to the role of Liverpool 8 in affecting the Merseybeat movement at all. This is to discount the evidence of residents of Liverpool 8.

Ramon Deen was adamant that the role of Liverpool 8, and its associated music, should not be underestimated. He made a clear distinction between the city centre and Liverpool 8 as sites of contrasting musical styles: "we had maybe 300 clubs in Liverpool 8 at the time. All over the place. A lot of Americans attended those clubs and of course they brought a lot of records with them from the States – amazing stuff. The influences of the music, in my head, were from all over the place. Whereas in Liverpool, the Cavern, places like that, were playing skiffle. Kind of like folk music. In Liverpool 8 it was a totally different scene, blues and jazz."<sup>425</sup> The absence of Liverpool 8, and black

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<sup>424</sup> *Mersey Beat* – August 31 – September 14 1961.

<sup>425</sup> Oral testimony from Ramon Deen, recorded by the author, 14 March 2018.

Liverpudlian musicians more generally, from the popular coverage of Liverpool at the time, has clearly caused considerable frustration. Deen, too, makes clear that Liverpool 8 was a place where considerable influence was gained by those most notorious in this period. "In the White House...I'd jump up and sing a song. It was great. Round about quarter past, twenty past two, Paul McCartney would come in with John Lennon. Sometimes with George...Paul and John would stand there watching the music...[later in the Cavern, the Beatles] were doing skiffle and stuff like that. Georgey Dixon that was in the In Crowd, he used to say that he wasn't bothered about the Beatles because he saw them as a three-chord group. Skiffle. But they changed to Fats Domino, Isley Brothers, and started to do harmonies. They nicked them off the lads at the White House!".<sup>426</sup> The economy in "Beatles stories" is obviously a notable one, and the exact details of the recollection should not be accepted as gospel truth, however the evidence described above, of musicians happily travelling to Liverpool 8 to listen to black music, should be indicative of the overall role of black music within the Merseybeat phenomenon, something that applies to the oral testimony as a whole.

The interviews mention aspects of cosmopolitanism, but there is little causation explained between that cosmopolitanism and the music that Liverpool produced in the 1960s. Frankie Connor recalled one occasion from when he was very young where, "these lads, [in] '56 or '57 were playing music. They had a record play and [we] went to the house in Parliament Street one day and it was calypso! I'd never heard calypso before and this was of the islands – West Indies. One lad was black. Their father had come over six year earlier in 1952 and this is a great sound...I remember hearing calypso music in the 50s and that was not a Cunard Yank music".<sup>427</sup> The suggestion that this was not Cunard Yank music, therefore is used to explain the lack of connection between the two. Kingsize Taylor, too, mentioned the "Caribbeans came over. Dock road had the Caribbean club on, by the Pier Head. If that's what you're looking for then you know where to go".<sup>428</sup>

It took close to two years for the linking of Liverpool and African American music to be brought to national attention, and it was still being made as if it were a novel

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<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>427</sup> Oral testimony from Frankie Connor, recorded by the author, 4 October 2015.

<sup>428</sup> Oral testimony from Ted 'Kingsize' Taylor, recorded by the author, 10 January 2017.



observation. In the *New Record Mirror* of January 1964 David Griffiths made the following claim:

Yet the critics, being new to the field, seem to have missed the big story which is that the Beatles are the culmination of a long-developing trend in which British pop stars have been moving closer and closer to the roots of all modern pop music – the American Negro.

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Here there is nothing particularly exceptional about Liverpool, the appreciation of black music is framed solely in British terms. An examination of the degree to which African-American music influenced Liverpoolian music can be found in the final chapter of this thesis, so is not the focus here. The extent to which Liverpool's own supposed cosmopolitanism contributed to the Merseybeat phenomenon very much is the focus. Griffiths went further to tie this specifically to Liverpool wherein the city was described in the kind of tone that suggested it was close to inevitable that the city would emerge as a centre of popular music in Britain:

Now comes the Liverpool sound, emanating from the one-time centre of Britain's African slave trade, today a city with a large coloured population, a seaport with direct connections with Harlem. Small wonder that R 'n' B got such a grip on scouse youngsters. And small wonder that the most successful of all the Liverpool groups is one that has a genuine love for the best American R 'n' B performers, one that sings and swings with the abandoned vigour of some of the best coloured groups across the Atlantic.<sup>430</sup>

The clear connection is made between Liverpool's seafaring history, its 'direct connection with Harlem', and the 'small wonder' why Liverpool groups were the ones that were best able to imitate and reimagine music that was traditionally associated with black Americans. The extent to which a 'direct connection to Harlem' can be evidenced in reality is questionable, but this is not to say that such a connection was not used in comparative ways. For example, in *Who Put the Beat In Merseybeat* Steve Aldo compared Liverpool 8 to Harlem as the "magnet" towards which people flocked and from which music came. The *New Record Mirror* piece tied Liverpool's less illustrious history (the slave trade) with an impression of a city that moved on from such endeavours and was swinging with the 'vigour of some of the best coloured groups from across the Atlantic'. From the picture being painted here it would seem that Liverpool was a city that was incredibly open and welcoming to people of different races and

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<sup>429</sup> *New Record Mirror* – 4 January 1964.

<sup>430</sup> *New Record Mirror* – 4 January 1964.

cultures. The reality of Liverpool, however, was considerably different. The Merseybeat movement was predominantly white. Indeed, the only black Liverpool group that had any small taste of success at the time were The Chants, members of whom would later achieve success by becoming The Real Thing. Other groups such as the Harlems were popular in and around Liverpool, and musicians such as Trevor Morais would achieve success individually, but it remained true that no black group ever 'broke through' into the Merseybeat mainstream.

The absence of linkage between the music being produced within Liverpool and the experience of black Liverpoolian musicians is stark. As aforementioned, the only black group that achieved any recognition in the national press at all was The Chants. With this in mind, however, the 'invisibility' of black Liverpool, as explained by Jacqueline Brown, is extremely noticeable within this musical paradigm. The extent to which the press was willing to define the nature of black influence on Liverpool music was not limited – the influence of black American music was never underplayed. With that in mind, however, the lack of introspection and examination of the black music scene in Liverpool, and how it contributed to the Merseybeat phenomenon, is fairly extraordinary.

#### *Afro-Caribbean Experience: Conclusions*

The broader Afro-Caribbean experience in Liverpool is clearly wrought with a significant number of problems. On the fact of whether the music was influenced by black music, whatever its origin, the matter seems fairly clear. It is not a new finding to explain the fact that the Beatles et al were heavily influenced by black, particularly black American, musical forms. However, this seems to run in direct contrast with the experience of black people within Liverpool. If cosmopolitanism is one of the distinguishing features of the city, then this should logically be accompanied by stories of integration and acceptance. This is, as the interviews make clear, not the case. The cosmopolitan framework, as it is applied to Liverpool, should be considerably rethought. The progression of the city's ethnic demography throughout the twentieth century, as explained earlier, is evidence enough of motivation to question one of John Belchem's central pillars of analysis. As he explains, the Irishness is not enough to explain the city's apparent exceptionalism, rather that it existed alongside a 'seafaring cosmopolitanism'. Liverpool at this time was certainly seafaring – as the running thread

through this research has explained, this is an undoubtedly crucial part of the Liverpoolian collective identity. However, questions should be raised about its cosmopolitanism. Belchem, though his writing on Liverpool has stretched beyond the post-war period, is undoubtedly focussed on the city in the pre-First World War, and inter-war periods. Extreme care should therefore be taken to avoid applying his theses to the city from the 1950s onward. Belchem, of course, does much of this himself, by providing an analysis of the city's relationship with race beyond the Second World War, he helps to plug the gaps in his previous work. However, if the city as a whole is to be considered exceptional, and cosmopolitanism is a key facet of that argument, then it would be churlish to suggest that the 'cosmopolitan' argument can only ever apply up to the Second World War, when the city relies so heavily on frameworks that play up that cosmopolitanism. Liverpool, "the world in one city" though it may have been at one point in time, was not in the 1960s, and became ever less so as the twentieth century wore on.

### **Chapter Three: America and Merseybeat**

The intersection of memory and identity is crucial to this thesis. A key factor in this research is the degree to which Liverpudlians and, as a perceived single entity, Liverpool, place a relationship with the United States at the centre of their collective identity and how it exists in collective memory. The Merseybeat phenomenon was undoubtedly heavily influenced by American musical styles. The purpose of this chapter is not to analyse, through musicological methodologies, whether or not the Merseybeat music did in fact have considerable American influence, however. It is instead to examine whether this influence was identifiable at the time, of what it consisted, how it was explained, and finally how it has been reinforced over time through local mythologising.

This chapter has two sections. The first will set out the manner in which the Merseybeat music phenomenon was defined in American terms and described as having clear American influences. This first section examines the myriad 'explanations', aside from the city's early access to American records, were constructed and put forward to account for the Merseybeat phenomenon. Accompanying this are analyses of how unique Liverpool was in this regard and an examination of how 'Liverpool performance' was considered to go hand-in-hand with the American musical styles that so dominated this period. The second section consists of a case study on the Cunard Yanks - specifically how Liverpool was, in popular mythology, particularly well-placed to be a receptacle for American music through the somewhat apocryphal Cunard Yanks. A topic of hotly contested memory, the Cunard Yanks have come to represent the supposed exceptionalism of the Liverpool music scene in this period. It is here that the 'early access' concept is examined.

#### **Section 1: Rationalisation of Merseybeat through American frameworks**

The musical links between Liverpool and the United States play a vital role in the popular discourse of the period. Representations of Liverpool and its music portray the city and its inhabitants as a place that was heavily, almost especially, influenced by the United States. In the newspapers, certainly, the United States is seen as an easy touchstone in trying to 'explain' the phenomenon. Hints of exceptionalism appear

throughout the press coverage of Liverpool at the time by way of suggesting that Liverpool was particularly beholden to American musical forms.

This section will therefore focus on extent to which these hints could be considered anything more; whether the articles in the press worked to create an image of Liverpool as being uniquely American, more so than any other British city. This is not to argue, however, that Liverpool was the only British city in this period to absorb American cultural influences. No other city had the level of press intrigue that Liverpool had. Rather, this section outlines how the city was considered exceptional for its supposed closeness with the United States, and how it was thus presented and perceived. As already discussed in the Literature Review, working class attitudes towards America were largely positive in this period, the issue for Liverpool is how the exceptionalism argument was presented with regard to America.

This sub-section, therefore, examines how Liverpool was presented in a unique manner, and how the Americanisation discussed thus far was supposedly a characteristic special to the city. This was usually done by suggesting that the city was in some way 'ahead of the curve' or some similar argument therein. The argument for Liverpool's exceptionalism in this regard is usually presented as having unique access to American records (to be examined) and the extent of Liverpoolian 'performance' which, when combined with the former, created something that was supposedly genuinely different.

The attempts at rationalising the Merseybeat phenomenon in this period, and thereafter, have often relied on framing it as American-led and -influenced. The extent to which this was done with direct application to Liverpool varies dependent on the source – some are very much Beatles-centric, for obvious reasons, whereas others take a more sociological approach, explaining Liverpool the city, in a roughly similar manner to that employed by Pells, as set out in the Literature Review. It is necessary, therefore, to set out the scale of this in the period in question. This section focusses on the different aspects that comprised the perceived American influence on the Merseybeat phenomenon, as depicted in both contemporary media and in oral history interviews conducted for this research. The idea of Liverpool's early access underpins many of the factors to be examined in this section and is the focus of Section 2.

Finally, this section also acts as context for the 'Cunard Yanks' case study in Section 2. If Liverpool truly did have a close relationship with the United States, the

manner and method in which it was explained and rationalised is of crucial importance to the central question of this entire chapter.

### Musicological Approaches

Though the purpose of this study is not to apply musicological modes of analysis to the Merseybeat phenomenon, musicological explanations of Merseybeat were and still are extremely common both in the period under examination for this research. Establishing the manner in which the music coming out of Liverpool at this time was indelibly associated with American musical forms is crucial context to the broader American theme that underpins this chapter.

To start with two of the most prominent rock and roll writers, Charlie Gillett and Paul Friedlander undertook considered and academic histories of the genre. Their attempts to explain various aspects of a movement that started off American, but spread further into the Anglosphere, provide some of the most detailed analysis. Gillett, in his history, places huge emphasis, for the Beatles at least, on the United States:

...the group's vocal style was derivative of two American styles which had not previously been put together, the hard rock 'n' roll style of singers like Little Richard and Larry Williams, and the soft gospel call-and-response style of the Shirelles, the Drifters and the rest of the singers produced by Leiber and Stoller, Luther Dixon, and Berry Gordy...although the twist had been very successful (without the impact it had in America), the gospel-harmony groups had very little success in Britain, and the result for a British audience was a sound with a familiar rhythm and a novel vocal style.<sup>431</sup>

Gillett identified one of the key aspects of the written history of the Merseybeat movement, that being a distinction between the 'familiar rhythm' and the 'novel vocal style'. Throughout the press coverage of the phenomenon attempts were made to understand the combination of Liverpool and American influences. Here Gillett echoes one of the suggestions in particular that the Merseybeat era can be understood as a meshing of Liverpool rhythm or performance and American music.

Paul Friedlander, in his own contribution to the history of rock 'n' roll, goes into more detail:

They adopted Holly's two guitar/bass/drums format, as well as his generally asexual adolescent version of romance. Their dexterous manipulation of rock lyrics was reminiscent of Tin Pan Alley and Chuck Berry; Berry's rhythm- and lead-guitar styles were also well represented. Vocal influences were Little Richard (a fusion of R&B and

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<sup>431</sup> Gillett, *The Sound of the City* p. 263

gospel energy and falsetto) and the Everly Brothers (close tenor harmonies and strummed acoustic rhythm guitar). George Harrison's electric-guitar solos were especially derivative of the rockabilly/classic stylings of guitarists Carl Perkins and Scotty Moore.<sup>432</sup>

Here is perhaps the best attempt to give The Beatles' influences clearer explanation. The vagueness of most of the literature on this subject can be contrasted with Friedlander's account, which provides the kind of specific detail required. Generalities about the influence of artists like Chuck Berry and Jerry Lee Lewis are replaced here with clear explanation of what he thought were the unique contributions that these American artists made to the musical style of The Beatles.

Friedlander and Gillett were not making novel observations, however. The manner in which the Merseybeat genre was influenced by American music is laid out in fairly clear terms in the contemporary press coverage, too. Bob Wooller, the compere of the Cavern, made one of the first attempts to explain the Merseyside music boom. He did so, as would come to be the fashion, by comparing the Beatles with the large numbers of black American singers that had proved to be their inspiration:

Here again, in the Beatles, was the stuff that screams are made of. Here was the excitement – both physical and aural – that symbolised the rebellion of youth in the ennuied mid-1950s. This was the real thing. Here they were, first five and then four human dynamos generating a beat which was irresistible. Turning back the Rock clock. Pounding out items from Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Carl Perkins, The Coasters and the other great etceteras [sic] of the era.<sup>433</sup>

The attribution of the Beatles' (then rather nascent) success to the resurrection of American rock 'n' roll is clearly not one that should surprise. Even in 1961, this early stage in the Merseybeat boom, the attempt to tie the music with America is clear. Care should be taken to not equate observations on the musical influences and styles of The Beatles with the wider collection of Liverpool bands as a whole, but this kind of commentary comes up repeatedly throughout the press' coverage. Liverpool's beat boom here is given a dint of authenticity and, importantly, originality. Where those such as Cliff Richard were pale imitations of the 'real thing', The Beatles had tapped into the original style of black American performers and given it its own Liverpool style. This stable of acts, including Chuck Berry and Little Richard, are referenced continuously.

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<sup>432</sup> Friedlander, *Rock and Roll* pp. 83-4.

<sup>433</sup> *Mersey Beat* – August 31 – September 14 1961.

This, however, is the first example of trying to describe which aspects of the beat movement were Liverpool and which were America. It seems understandable that the compere of the epicentre of the Merseybeat phenomenon would never want to downplay Liverpool's role, but it is the first example of attempts, throughout the local and national music press, to explain the component parts of the phenomenon. Here Wooller, without explicitly meaning to, lays the groundwork for what would become some of the accepted tropes of the Mersey movement.

Wooller differentiates between the 'physical and aural' implying that the two might be totally separate characteristics. For the aural aspect, the music of Chuck Berry, Little Richard et al was of paramount importance. For the performance aspect, it was the pent-up energy of five<sup>434</sup> Liverpudlians generating a 'beat that was irresistible'. Far from creating anything new musically, Wooller claims that The Beatles (at this stage) relied on their energy. Little is done here to paint Liverpool as being a unique receiver of American influence, Cliff Richard is mentioned in the same article in disparaging terms, which seems to suggest that he was similarly exposed to American records.

The difference, however, is Wooller's suggestion that The Beatles used their knowledge of American music to innovate, whereas Richard only to imitate. At this stage there is little on a wider 'Liverpool Sound', but the idea of performative innovation is clearly privileged in creating space between the Beatles and those acts such as Cliff Richard. Reading too much into the observation of one group in particular would be a mistake here, but the same arguments that were made with regard to the Beatles by Bob Wooller in 1961 were applied almost totally to the other Mersey groups as the 1960s went on.

The association between Liverpool groups and American artists was made extremely clear in much of the press. A piece in the *New Record Mirror* in 1963 was typical of the many music papers that attempted to tie a Liverpool group with the United States. In this instance, it was done by suggesting that:

Most of the Liverpool groups tend to sound the same whether it is intentional or unintentional. There is one group which doesn't however. That's the Searchers, who manage to inject a distinctive sound into their discs. They use falsetto and bass backing more in the style of the more popular US vocal groups, than in the style of the British groups. Like most of the Liverpool groups, the boys tend to veer towards the R&B field for their numbers. But unlike other groups they refuse to call their music R&B.<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>434</sup> N.b. at this point Stuart Sutcliffe was still alive and Pete Best was on drums.

<sup>435</sup> *New Record Mirror*, 29 June 1963.



The contrast, therefore, was between America and England. For the group referenced here, the Searchers, the use of falsetto and bass backing is the key differentiating factor – a questionable claim – but one where difference was claimed nonetheless. The Searchers were also the subject of a piece in a *Hit Parade* article in 1964, wherein it was claimed that “Fans of great rhythm and blues stars like Fats Domino, Jerry Lee Lewis, Little Richard, Chuck Berry and the Drifters, the Searchers are doing a lot to establish that style of music on the British scene. Via the now famous Mersey Sound, the Searchers have introduced a new sound of their own into pop music and they are more than pleased it has caught on.”<sup>436</sup> Much of the evidence in this regard is extremely similar – mentions of the music and also being influenced by artists such as Chuck Berry and Little Richard. Although there are many more examples, the evidence provided on this should suffice. The final example, from *Melody Maker* in 1963, consisted of a letter from a young fan, which shows that even articles, or letters, that were not effusive with praise of the Liverpool groups retained acceptance, at the very least, of the groups’ closeness with the United States:

“I’ve been an R&B fan for about six years now” said Brian Moore of Old Swan, “I don’t think the scene is as strong as it used to be. The groups don’t live up to the American standards in my opinion, but they’re good all the same. They’re trying to bring music by the Fats Dominos, Bo Diddleys and Jerry Lee Lewises back to the public and that’s good anyway.”<sup>437</sup>

This writer, therefore, was critical of the Liverpool groups’ ability to live up to the standards set by the artists mentioned therein but was not questioning the fact that much of this musical styling was based on America.

The accepted knowledge, therefore, seemed to suggest that there certainly was some kind of connection between the artists and the United States. This has not, so far, been given a crucially Liverpool inflection, however. The explanations are limited and general – statements of fact that the groups in question did base much of their music on American rock ‘n’ roll, rather than any attempts to explain why. The following sub-sections will showcase where and how Liverpool-specific arguments were made, constructed, and disseminated.

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<sup>436</sup> *Hit Parade*, January 1964.

<sup>437</sup> *Melody Maker*, October 1963.

Aside from the musicological framework, there are five other ways in which the Liverpool connection to the United States was presented in the music press at the time and in the interviews conducted for this research. They are all underpinned by the most satisfactory explanation – the city’s ‘early access’ to American records and, inter alia, the ‘Cunard Yank’ idea. These factors were noticeably superficial. The first concerns the city’s reputation as a centre for country and western music.

### Country and Western Music

Liverpool had been aligned with American musical influence long before the emergence of the Merseybeat phenomenon. Called the ‘Nashville of the North’, Liverpool acquired a reputation for being the centre of country music in Britain. The proliferation of country groups in the city started as early as 1953 and the justification given for Liverpool’s supposedly country-receptive palate, the ‘Cunard Yanks’, whose position in Liverpoolian musical folklore is well-established, is often linked by association with explanations applied to Merseybeat. It was suggested, in a comprehensive survey of the early country scene in 1950s Liverpool, that “the fact that Liverpool was the direct route for shipping traffic from America clearly had a great deal to do with why country music emerged there first”.<sup>438</sup> Joe Butler, a considerable figure on the country scene in Liverpool, claimed, “Liverpool is known to this day as the biggest place for country in Britain. At the time we started, there was no country anywhere else at all”.<sup>439</sup> Exceptional tones are clearly present here, therefore.

Alan Clayson’s biography of George Harrison provides further clarification on the importance of country music in Liverpool at this time, “Merseyside had more of a country and western bias: within the area abounded more such artists than anywhere outside Nashville”.<sup>440</sup> Billy Fury, too, drew a direct link between country and rock ‘n’ roll, “before rock ‘n’ roll I’d been into country and western music. Actually, in Liverpool, everybody used to play country and western, Hank Williams or whatever. Anything which had some lyrics about a bit of trouble or a bit of heartbreak”.<sup>441</sup> Liverpool was therefore being painted as the sole contributor to the British country music scene soon

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<sup>438</sup> K. McManus, *Nashville of the North: Country Music in Liverpool*, (Liverpool: Institute of Popular Music, 1994) p. 2.

<sup>439</sup> J. Butler, quoted in *Ibid*, p. 1.

<sup>440</sup> A. Clayson, *The Quiet One: A Life of George Harrison*, (London: Sanctuary, 1997) p. 49.

<sup>441</sup> Billy Fury, quoted in Du Noyer, *Wondrous Place*, p. 58.

after the Second World War ended. The fact that country was/is a uniquely American musical form gives the impression that Liverpool was closer to the United States than anywhere else in Britain.

On country, there should be little doubt about the fact that it existed and was hugely influential on the city. This is not a unique finding – as McManus, referenced above, can testify. However, the links between country and western and the Merseybeat movement are few and far between in the music press. Liverpool’s country and western heritage was used as explanation of the contemporary Merseybeat phenomenon in only a handful of sources. First, in *Mersey Beat* itself, where it was claimed that on country and western music, “Liverpool is a stronghold. Here again, the standard is high. In fact, the best country and western music is probably to be found here”.<sup>442</sup> This seems to be much more of a locally-based method of explanation – its appearance in *Mersey Beat* is used to express the city’s predilection towards the production of high-quality music. Directed at a local audience, *Mersey Beat* is an important resource in understanding how the newspaper wished to project a particular image of the city – one that was in many ways unique.

The only example from the national press of this manner of explanation comes from the *New Record Mirror* in 1963 where it is claimed that, “the potential in the Rocking City is tremendous. Although there is a definite, recognisable Liverpool Sound, there are still many groups who have their own individual sound...what puzzles me is the fact that no-one seems to realise that Liverpool is also the centre of country and western music and this may add to the legend of Liverpool the Rocking City on Merseyside”.<sup>443</sup> Evidence of the country and western impact on Merseybeat, though this may seem – it showcased what the author perceived to be an important overlooked factor among the national music press – this is reduced by the fact that it was actually written by Bill Harry, the editor of *Mersey Beat*. The country and western connection, therefore, did not seem to be much of a factor for the music press in analysing the Merseybeat phenomenon.

The oral histories provide a slightly different angle on this question, touching on the importance of country in a manner that suggests the link between the two was closer than the majority of the press, bar Bill Harry, seemed to suggest. Brian Jones, for

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<sup>442</sup> *Mersey Beat*, December 13 1962 – January 33 1963.

<sup>443</sup> *New Record Mirror*, 20 April 1963.

example, played up the connection, and suggested further that there was a direct link to the Merseybeat groups: “there’s always been a big country and western influence in Liverpool. Sonny Webb and the Cascades became a country and western band who were quite big...a lot of bands played country. Even the Undertakers did in the early days”.<sup>444</sup> Kingsize Taylor referenced country music in influencing his early years, too, “I liked all that type of music, all of the Slim Whitman stuff, it was all...sort of semi...well it was country music. Without country music you’d have never got into rock ‘n’ roll if you think about it. It was a natural progression from jazz to country to country-rock and then to rock ‘n’ roll”.<sup>445</sup> Musicological assertions aside, for Taylor and Jones the country link was an important one in creating some kind of explanation for Merseybeat. In Taylor’s own rationalisation, the city’s close association with country provided a clear path to rock and roll, and therefore in explaining, inter alia, one facet that influenced the Merseybeat movement.

On the face of this, therefore, country did seem to be more of a tangible, identifiable influence. Explaining the process, as Taylor did, seems to provide more of a concrete understanding of how the former (country) affected the latter (Merseybeat). This is an area of contested memory, however, and such efforts to ‘explain’ the prominence of one factor can often be overly privileged to the factor in discussion at that moment. The distinctions were sometimes not that clear-cut. David Boyce, for example, suggested that many of the terms used to define different genres of music within Liverpool were often quite interchangeable, “I was a jazz fan, and so from the age of 15 I’d go down on a Saturday night when they’d have a jazz band on. Then they’d have a rock band or a skiffle group or...all of these terms were in a way interchangeable. The whole notion of country and western? They weren’t exclusive. I remember there was an interval band they used to have that was called somebody and his country cousins or something!”.<sup>446</sup> Similarly, Jones, upon clarifying previous comments, emphasised that this was a broad movement, incorporating, “not just Irish music, but country music, blues and that too. Skiffle was the main thing that started it all really.”<sup>447</sup> Country being one part of a much larger musical palate, therefore, seems to be a theory that works. The degree to which a

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<sup>444</sup> Oral testimony from Brian Jones, recorded by the author, 6 September 2017.

<sup>445</sup> Oral testimony from Ted ‘Kingsize’ Taylor, recorded by the author, 10 January 2017.

<sup>446</sup> Oral testimony from David Boyce, recorded by the author, 27 January 2016.

<sup>447</sup> Oral testimony from Brian Jones, recorded by the author, 6 September 2017.

satisfactory explanation of how those other aspects intertwine to produce something called Merseybeat is troublesome, however.

Liverpool's historic relationship with country music, therefore, provides something of an insight into the wider movement. Like so many of the other considerations, however, it is not enough on its own to explain Merseybeat.

If there is any connection between this country music and the Merseybeat itself is somewhat difficult to divine. Analyses rarely went beyond a recognition that an affinity for country music existed in Liverpool and that the Merseybeat period, too, existed – correlation rather than causation. The broader analyses of Liverpool's American connection, however, did provide some more evidence. The American connection was definitely understood and expanded upon in the press analysis, both local and national – though the approach was often scattergun with attempts to 'explain' Merseybeat often incorporating such a wide range of factors that they became difficult to link together.

### *The Liverpool Accent*

Not the most common explanation, the Liverpool accent was used sparingly as a method of explaining the popularity of the music. Existing, as it does, in a particular place within the British national popular psyche,<sup>448</sup> the accent was sometimes deployed as a touchstone with which people were familiar, and therefore potentially as an accessible method of analysis for a national audience.

The sleeve notes of John Lennon's posthumously released *Menlove Avenue* album of 1986 included a note from Yoko Ono, claiming that, "John's American rock roots, Elvis, Fats Domino and Phil Spector are evident in these tracks. But what I hear in John's voice are the other roots, of the boys who grew up in Liverpool, listening to Greensleeves, BBC Radio and Tessie O'Shea".<sup>449</sup> Lennon's voice is used to express the dual influences of America and Liverpool – existing in equal measures to create what was an unmistakable voice. Again, this notorious feature of the Liverpudlian popular construction was not explained on its own. The fusion with America is crucial.

The local accents, it is argued, imbued Liverpudlians with an essential quality that ensured their speech patterns were particularly malleable – easily shaped to the

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<sup>448</sup> See Harry Enfield's 'Scousers' characters in his 1990s television programme, for example.

<sup>449</sup> In Sara Cohen, *Beyond the Beatles*, p. 32.

American trend. On this, therefore, early claims of exceptionalism are clear. Liverpool got there first, it was more Americanised than other places without the benefit of a port. This was a method of explanation that was therefore not just limited to the local music press. In national musical publications, the idea that the Merseybeat phenomenon was a fusion of Liverpoolian characteristics and American music continued apace. *Melody Maker* carried a feature in March 1963 examining whether Liverpool was 'Britain's Nashville'. In the feature, it was suggested with the help of an interview with Tony Jackson of The Searchers:

On Merseyside exists an R&B scene that could only find its counterpart in the USA. 'Liverpool, the Nashville of Britain?' someone sneeringly said in London, 'you're joking'. All Merseyside needs is a first class recording centre and it would be entitled to become a slice of Tennessee – though the music has a scouse sound that Americans couldn't copy back...did he think the 'coloured' vocal sound came via the Merseyside accent? 'Yes, you find that kind of throaty sound and accent, nasal too. Maybe that's how we get it to sound like that.'<sup>450</sup>

Notable here is the idea that Liverpool would be entitled to a slice of Tennessee, whilst also acknowledging that America is where the authentic musical style came from, hence 'couldn't copy back'. Further, difference is established between the Tennessee style and the Liverpool one. The style that could not be copied back was the 'scouse sound' emanating from the supposedly nasal accent. This is possibly as close as anyone gets to properly defining the split between American influence and Liverpool characteristic. Finally, the description of Merseyside requiring a 'first class recording centre' hints at one of the other key themes in Liverpool performance at the time – amateurism. The Liverpoolian performance that produced the Merseybeat groups was a specifically amateur one. Whilst the 'sound' that Liverpool produced (whether a result of a throaty or nasal accent, or something else) was appealing and had led to success, the comparison of Liverpool with London hints, even at this early stage, that any such success would be fleeting.

Frankie Connor was explicit in his explanation of what Merseybeat actually was. Dismissing the Beatles as "they to me just happened to come from Liverpool. It wasn't the Mersey Sound", he suggested, "what Mersey Sound was to me was American music with a nasal twang that we took back to America. Everyone doing Chuck Berry songs. Bo Diddly, Buddy Holly songs. They were American songs. [We] just took them back,

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<sup>450</sup> *Melody Maker*, March 23 1963.

repackaged them. That's what it was really".<sup>451</sup> The 'nasal twang' referring to the accent, Connor's testimony represents a common theme in much Merseybeat discussion – the idea of selling American music back to Americans. The accent, therefore, is placed at the centre of this analysis – a crucial ingredient in what made the music so popular.

If the accent was a crucial 'essential' construction within Merseybeat analysis, it was followed rapidly by the idea of there being a Liverpoolian 'performance' which drew out and made the most of these American styles. Sometimes synonymous, performance was regularly used as a seemingly precise, but very rarely defined, means to better understand 'why' the Merseybeat emerged where it did.

### Performance

Explanations that focussed on performance were crucial in the Merseybeat analysis. Of relevance to this chapter, however, is the manner in which it was done to 'explain' the fusion of American music with Liverpoolian performance. Performance on its own, however, is not an acceptable manner of evaluating how this music was presented as 'performance' was given myriad definitions in the research evidence. It was sometimes given cod-musicological definition – particular methods of playing for example. Sometimes sociological – explaining how Liverpoolian performance was tied up with socio-economic hardship, for example. Nevertheless, the manner in which the perceived need of Liverpoolians to perform was so regularly bound up with American paradigms was striking.

Performance within popular music is a concept that transcends a number of others. If performance is assumed to mean 'live performance' to audiences, then the idea takes a more solid shape. Though heavily tied in with musicological methodologies, it has been used to explain how it can help create distinct local 'sounds' – per Gibson and Connell, "live performance, and lyrical connection to place, stimulate ties to fans, who identify with common issues, sentiments, and words that may invest places with meanings. Audiences, far from being passive consumers of pre-packaged information...are active agents in the construction of meaning in a live performance".<sup>452</sup> The live performance, therefore, is crucial in creating some sense of identity and belonging between performer and audience. Performance, the live playing of music to an audience, was explained not

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<sup>451</sup> Oral testimony from Frankie Connor, recorded by the author, 4 October 2015.

<sup>452</sup> Gibson and Connell, *Sound Tracks*, p. 115.

as a direct consequence of the importation of American records, but a crucial Liverpoolian characteristic which, when combined with this importation, created the essence necessary, in a quasi-symbiotic relationship, for the Merseybeat phenomenon to grow.

The 'American connection' was therefore heavily linked with performance. Performance was not in and of itself a factor that was privileged as a stand-alone means of analysis. Rather it appeared in and among different explanations and in different forms. The concept of Liverpool's reputation for musical performance joining forces with American music appears regularly in the period examined. Press reports largely identified the same group of artists that influenced the Liverpool groups and from here the attempts to understand why the Liverpool groups were so dominant at this period of time grew. The importation of American records was not alone used to explain why Liverpool's music became so popular in the period examined. Absorption of American musical styles and forms would not have stood Liverpool in any great stead had no-one had the initiative to pick up a guitar and form a group.

Performance is vital to the community aspect of any music and any attempt to suggest that musical performance at this time was a uniquely Liverpoolian trait would, of course, be absurd. However, this is not a binary question. Performance in one city does not exclude performance in another but questions of degrees and relative appreciation of performance *of this type* should be considered. The importance of performance to Liverpool has been explained by Sara Cohen, in her work on rock music in Liverpool, who suggested that "many bands on Merseyside [for whom] performance was an important and central activity...some were said to be better live than recorded, either because their music incorporated a 'raw', untamed, 'rough' quality of sound or because the visual features of their performance were particularly important".<sup>453</sup>

The idea that Liverpool was a place that fostered performance appears in a number of different sources. The suggestion is that the city's working-class heritage and port city status combined to create the kind of conditions that would allow people who wanted to play music to do so and gain the kind of experience and exposure that stood them in good stead for what would eventually become the Merseybeat phenomenon. The transient nature of people passing through the docks, it is suggested, contributed to

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<sup>453</sup> Cohen, *Rock Culture in Liverpool*, p. 93.



this tendency to perform or, at the very least, created the intense demand for entertainment in the limited time that sailors had onshore. It was this, combined with the access that Liverpoolians had to American records, that supposedly imbued the city with a unique quality which made it easier to understand and, importantly for the press at the time, to explain the sudden popularity it gained.

The national music press coverage at the time was in many ways used as a method to promote this particular idea. Gerry Marsden, of Gerry and the Pacemakers, gave an illustrative example of the permeating influence of American musicians on young Liverpoolians:

Boy, the competition was really fierce. I remember that if an R & B record, say something by Chuck Berry or Jerry Lee Lewis was issued then I'd rush down to the shop and buy it straight away. And chances were I'd see somebody like John Lennon of the Beatles in the same queue. Then there'd be a big rush to see who could get their version of it out first. But this is probably what has given the Liverpool groups that so-called 'Liverpool' sound.<sup>454</sup>

American music was a touchstone for the Liverpool groups and this is perfectly apparent in the press reports. Marsden here also hints at the idea that this may have been a ritual unique to Liverpool, tying the urgent rush of the groups to get their own versions out as quickly as possible with the 'Liverpool sound'. Performance therefore cuts straight to the heart of Liverpoolian music in this period. Rushing down to the shop to get the latest Chuck Berry record was not enough, performance and practice was required in order to create this 'Liverpool Sound'. The picture being presented to the readership of these newspapers, therefore, was one of the Liverpool Sound being something unique to Liverpool – the listening to American records and the determination to recreate them. "Getting the version out first" is crucial in this analysis – this was not being done privately, the entire point of the performative aspect of the American influence was to disseminate the music as much as possible presumably through live performance, owing to the lack of recording studios in the city.

Performance was a crucial aspect of the Liverpoolian musical palate. Frank Shaw, in his autobiographical depiction of the city, described playing an instrument in Liverpool as coming along with the requirement to, "tackle it as you must tackle life, with a deal of pugnacity".<sup>455</sup> On performance he suggested that, "live music was

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<sup>454</sup> *Hit Parade* – June 1963.

<sup>455</sup> Shaw, *My Liverpool* p. 85.

preferred to the gramophone, and of all sources of music the Liverpudlian preferred the old Joanna. There was a time when most households in Liverpool had a piano...it was aspired to by the lowliest as never even the telly aerial or the Cortina was".<sup>456</sup> Music, therefore, was not just something to be enjoyed from a distance, but something to participate in and to produce.

Paul du Noyer explained the Liverpudlian appetite for entertainment with reference to the docks but also directly linked it to the city's emergence as a centre of British popular music. "That's how Liverpool became the cradle of British pop. It was always a town where entertainment was actively sought. The appetite was sharper and the demand was, well, more demanding. Again, and again you hear of people from musical households, and when they go out at night to pay for entertainment, it had better be good".<sup>457</sup> Going further in a separate interview, he focussed specifically on the issue of Liverpudlian performance, "there seemed to be something in Liverpool as a place which produced performers and the place which produced a certain kind of audience who were themselves one of the great incentives to performance...these characteristics were the ones that, it seemed to me, recurred down the years, down the generations and offered some sort of tenuous connecting link between the folk songs of the nineteenth century sailors and the taverns through to the electronic popular music of the late 1950s through to the club culture of Cream".<sup>458</sup> Du Noyer admitted his romantic view of Liverpool on this issue and his testimony cannot be thought of as a definitive and empirical study on the link between Liverpool's supposed tendency towards performance and its reputation as a centre of musical creativity, but this link that was made in his own memory is representative of popular Liverpudlian thought in and of itself.

Performance is a theme that crops up in general terms in the oral testimony, too. A number of the interviewees harked back to their younger years, sharing memories of how important performance was in family gatherings. Frankie Connor, for example, shared a memory of his childhood years in what he called a 'Liverpool do'. He described it as, "a good Liverpool do, a good old do. Everyone had to do a 'turn'. And my Dad sang. Mum did too to a point but my Dad always thought he was Bing Crosby...there'd be

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<sup>456</sup> Ibid. p. 85.

<sup>457</sup> Du Noyer, *Wondrous Place*, p. 3.

<sup>458</sup> Oral testimony from Paul du Noyer, recorded by the author, 18 February 2016.

cousins, people used to copy the Americans. Crosby, Hope. These guys were in the movies and we'd take our entertainment".<sup>459</sup> The familial connection for Frankie was clear – the combination of both performance and American cultural influences were a part of him from a very young age. Important here, too, is the fact that this was performance for the entertainment of others – it was a communal, public activity, not a private endeavour, though private in many ways – taking place as it did within a home or domestic space. Performance, therefore, transcended the public/private divide and is somewhat more complex than simply playing in front of live audiences.

Albie Donnelly, as well describes a very similar upbringing, "I do remember parties when I was a kid, my mother would never have them at our house...there would be people singing, not many people who could play the piano. They would sing, and they'd go to the pub and you'd end up with your cousin standing outside the pub for hours".<sup>460</sup> A very different recollection but one that touches on a similar theme – the importance of performance within his formative years. Ted Taylor shared his own story of the importance of performance within family entertainment, "most of my family played an instrument. My uncles played, my granddad played organ, my father used to sing, my mother used to sing and play guitar. Everybody took turns and if you got up and did a song you'd get something. You'd get a little treat or something".<sup>461</sup> These testimonies all point towards the importance of performance. Though these testimonies do not draw direct links between this and the performance of American music by Liverpool groups, the fact that this acted as a foundation for so many of these people does link with the American connection as the music played was so regularly American and the explanations of the Merseybeat phenomenon privileged this idea as the movement garnered more attention.

For one such example, in explaining the rise of Liverpool groups, a piece in *DISC* magazine suggested that Liverpool groups, "as R 'n' B and old rock fans, they wanted to play the uncompromising, rough, rocking music they admired on American records from artists like Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Jerry Lee Lewis and Jimmy Reed. But the music came out with a Liverpool accent, not just the words, but the whole performance".<sup>462</sup> Here is the concept of Liverpool 'performance' emerging in the

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<sup>459</sup> Oral testimony from Frankie Connor, recorded by the author, 4 October 2015.

<sup>460</sup> Oral testimony from Albie Donnelly, recorded by the author, 17 November 2015.

<sup>461</sup> Oral testimony from Ted 'Kingsize' Taylor, recorded by the author, 10 January 2017.

<sup>462</sup> *DISC Magazine*, September 28 1963.

newspapers. The idea that the music itself was American but the delivery was Liverpudlian or Scouse permeated many of the interviews undertaken and columns written. Whether these were attempts to claim Liverpool music as their own and avoid some of the negative connotations that were being made is not so clear. Nevertheless, the closeness between the description of the music as rough and rocking and the Liverpool performance is notable. Performance is given prominence, though is often left undefined, however.

The interweaving of American music and Liverpool performance in memory is clear from this testimony. However, it is not done in a manner to cast aspersions on the authenticity of the music that Liverpool was producing. Rather, it was particularly Liverpool to be receptive to these new musical influences and then to try and reproduce that sound in a way that was available to Liverpudlians. Indeed, Kingsize Taylor seems to represent the Liverpool manner of playing as a reaction against the softer, imitative styles associated with artists like Cliff Richard. In criticising some of the less talented groups that were on Merseyside at the time, Mal Jefferson adds to the Liverpool/America fusion idea:

Ted taught them all the Little Richard, Fats Domino songs and everything else. They completely changed. They still weren't as good as many other Merseybeat groups but they changed their routine to make it more early Mersey. Basically it was people struggling to do American music that was made with big organised bands, you know.<sup>463</sup>

Again, the fusion between Liverpool and America. This evidence works to back up Taylor's reports on the music style as a whole.

Relatively brief though this sub-section may be, performance permeates through the analyses of Merseybeat at this time. As aforementioned, it was not used excessively on its own, however. It did take on a permeating character, appearing alongside, or as a synonym for, other methods of 'explaining' the phenomenon and as such will be referenced further through this research. One such way was through the concept of amateurism. If not strictly concerning the dissemination of music via live performance, the relentless practice of these American forms by amateurs was held up as a key factor in the emergence of Merseybeat.

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<sup>463</sup> Oral testimony from Mal Jefferson, recorded by the author, 12 July 2017.

### Amateurism

Amateurism was used in much of the evidence for this research in a manner that suggested a lack of training. Rather than the performance of music being a pastime (in lieu of another job) or not being paid for it (the Merseybeat acts were paid, albeit at different levels, for the gigs they undertook), accusations of amateurism were instead used in a manner that suggested a lack of ability or training. In the Merseybeat sense, it was regularly used in conjunction with performance – a means of explaining the way that the musicians played. On occasion, this carried class connotations – as to be shown in sub-section 5.

The idea of Liverpool having a head start was not limited to the early access to records. In addition, it was occasionally suggested that it was due to the keenness and determination of its amateur musicians. Amateurism combined with stylised interpretation of American music was fundamental to the Liverpool sound.

Paul Du Noyer's interpretation on the concept of performance combined with America is below:

You've got this city that's predisposed towards music, that has a better than average knowledge of live, simple, American musical forms – chiefly blues, R 'n' B, rock 'n' roll, country and western – all of which are easily reproducible by talented amateurs on cheap instruments, more easily available in Liverpool than elsewhere. To be played at a population that seems extraordinarily receptive to live entertainment...that absolutely lives for its Friday and its Saturday nights and creates what seems to be an unparalleled number of beat music venues around the whole city through the 1950s.<sup>464</sup>

Du Noyer clearly combines the concepts of live American forms with Liverpudlian amateurism.

Amateurism appears in the contemporary music press, too. Suggesting that the skiffle movement was crucial to Merseybeat, an article from DISC put amateurism at the heart of its analysis, referring to artists such as Lonnie Donegan as providing the inspiration for many of the beat groups. The journey that many Liverpudlian groups underwent from skiffle to rock 'n' roll has been well covered,<sup>465</sup> but it is important to recognise how it is placed at the centre of what supposedly made Liverpool so different in this period. This investigation by DISC tended towards the kind of language that

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<sup>464</sup> Oral testimony from Paul du Noyer, recorded by the author, 18 February 2016.

<sup>465</sup> See S. Leigh, and J. Firminger., *Halfway to Paradise: Britpop, 1955-1962* (Folkestone: Finbarr, 1996) and Du Noyer, *Wondrous Place*.

hinted at amateurism. At the beginning of the piece in question, the Liverpool phenomenon is described as “a tidal wave of brash, bashing music which has swept Britain – a music that is rooted in America, but peculiarly British in every way”.<sup>466</sup> The was linked by description to how rock ‘n’ roll and skiffle smacked, “of complete amateurism and what amounted to a complicated noise”.<sup>467</sup> The music, therefore, was brash and bashing – not particularly reflective of a presumably more subdued British style, yet contradicted in the next sentence by being described as American yet peculiarly British. Amateurism is key in this analysis – and is used to create clear links between the production of music by Liverpoolian groups and the ‘root’ of that music itself.

The emphasis here therefore rests on how music could be easily reproduced by talented amateurs. *The Sunday Times* reached for similar characteristics when trying to explain the Liverpool group phenomenon:

Although there is no pat explanation for Liverpool’s gift of early impetus to this basically American, basically rhythm-and-blues music in Britain, there are many clues. It is a big, in-drawn city, sustaining its own self-centred life. It has a tradition of home-brewed entertainment, based on a rash of clubs which thrive, too, in its hinterland.<sup>468</sup>

Again, the combination of America and Liverpool comes to the fore. Here there is even an acknowledgment that there is no easy explanation for the ascendancy of Liverpool groups, it just happened - the Mersey Sound comes from Liverpool and it is ‘basically American’. More important here is the desire of the newspaper to provide an explanation and falling down on some of the characteristics that have contributed to the ‘exceptionalist’ idea. In describing Liverpool as “in-drawn, sustaining its own self-centred life”, apartness becomes a key factor. Add in the “tradition of home-brewed entertainment” (n.b. explicitly not ‘professional’) and the way in which this specific amateurism can be constructed as the unique property of Liverpool becomes clear.

Amateurism therefore has class connotations in this regard – ‘home-brewed’ entertainment hinting at an inability to enjoy or watch music professionally. In that sense, this follows on to the following sub-section – the manner in which Liverpool’s apparent connection with the United States was explained in a manner that privileged ideas such as class, and Liverpool socio-economic status.

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<sup>466</sup> *DISC Magazine*, September 28 1963.

<sup>467</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>468</sup> D. Jewell, ‘The Beatles Beat the Lot’, *The Sunday Times* (15 September 1963).

### Class and Americanism

Class, or issues tangentially related to it, cuts to the heart of many of the accounts of Liverpool at this time. Many historical accounts of Liverpool tie the city with America by referring to its supposed outward-looking, cosmopolitan nature.<sup>469</sup> Liverpool's status as a port city is used also to explain the strong American connections that permeate the city's cultural and musical spheres. Tony Lane, when describing the combination of port city sailors and the social revolutions of the 1960s, suggested that, "there were the established and self-confident traditions of the other Liverpool only waiting, as it were, to be liberated. And then came rock 'n' roll and its social subversiveness which Liverpool, with its long-standing American associations and its democratic temperament, drank down in quarts".<sup>470</sup> 'Democratic temperament' is, here, a euphemism for trade unionism and working-class solidarity. This 'other' Liverpool is what would become Liverpool – young men of moderate means exploiting the commercial and economic benefits that the sea provided. Liverpool's cosmopolitan character is referenced again by Sara Cohen: "the outward-looking character of Liverpool made it more susceptible to American cultural trends brought over by sailors in the 1950s and 1960s and by American servicemen at Burtonwood...such trends influenced the hundreds of skiffle bands performing in the city in the 1950s and gradually a large number of rock bands emerged which encouraged promoters to bring American rhythm and blues artists to Britain and, in particular, to Liverpool".<sup>471</sup> These two accounts privilege the working-class experiences of Liverpool in this period. Americanisation was for Liverpool, per Cohen and Lane, the preserve of working-class people undertaking working-class employment. As a consequence of this, Liverpool was presented as ripe for American influence.

That being said, these issues might not be quite as simple as a boiling down to 'class'. Rather, tangential issues such as anti-authority and casual labour, combined to possibly provide, or provoke, a tendency to hold affinity towards the United States. On this, Belchem himself provides guidance on the contradictions within this American paradigm, "by virtue of its seafaring links, the city was highly adapted to US styles, whether it was American-American R&B of white country and western. The Beatles

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<sup>469</sup> See Belchem, etc.

<sup>470</sup> Lane, *City of the Sea*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997) p. 119.

<sup>471</sup> Cohen, *Rock Culture in Liverpool*, p. 13.

were steeped in this environment of curiosity, with country being so prevalent that Liverpool was called the Nashville of the North...yet while American black music has long had a radical aura, by virtue of the energy, sexual directness and racial self-affirmation it provided to a British audience, country music has a reputation for social and stylistic conservatism".<sup>472</sup> These two strands of American music need not necessarily conflict. Indeed, although capital-c conservatism may rankle within the contemporary city, it was once a surprisingly strong electoral force. Conservatism, too, is not a preserve of the middle and upper classes and can, indeed, be a powerful social and cultural determinant of working-class behaviours.

The appeal of the United States to young, working-class men has been set out elsewhere – notably by Lyons, as examined in the Literature Review. This theme certainly came through in the oral history evidence. Most articulate on this was Frankie Connor, once a member of Liverpool group the Hideaways, who described his youthful visions of America in terms that accord with those described by Lyons. For him, echoing the familial traditions outlined above, America represented a vision of modernity that was unavailable to him in Liverpool as one son in a working-class family:

It'd be the movies I think. Records came in, Hank Williams came in. But I do think the movies were the biggest influence in the 50s. Again, because it predates television. And American movies in colour were...we lived in a very grey world in Liverpool. I remember as a kid everything was grey and black and white. I watched a movie – Elvis, Loving You – cars, white Cadillacs, pink shirts. To us it was another world entirely, didn't seem real to us. They were over there, we were over here. Different planet.<sup>473</sup>

Liverpool, therefore, was provincial. It was grey and black, although whether this is either an imposition from his memory of the time is unclear. Nevertheless, this description works to paint Liverpool in the terms that would become habitual as the twentieth century wore on. America acted as an inspiration for these young people that there was something more than the conditions prevalent in post-war Liverpool. The working-class admiration of American ideals was not unique to Liverpool, but the relative ease with which a young Liverpudlian could have contact with Americans possibly was. Frankie went further, "my brother was in the merchant navy and did the New York run. He'd go to New York for two weeks, come back and [American accent] 'hey Frankie how are you man, great?'. He'd only been there for two weeks but he'd

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<sup>472</sup> Belchem and Riggs, *Liverpool: City of Radicals*, p. 100.

<sup>473</sup> Oral testimony from Frankie Connor, recorded by the author, 4 October 2015.



become a Yank overnight, with this affected accent, which was just funny".<sup>474</sup> This description of his brother establishes the importance of America within the Liverpudlian psyche. On the one hand Frankie described how distant and alien the United States seemed to him as a young man in a dark and grey city and on the other displayed the way in which Liverpudlians had far greater contact with the United States than inhabitants of other cities may have done and, importantly, how easily the mixing of Liverpudlian and American became. The link between austerity and the United States, too, transcends the class paradigm.

At this stage, it was clear that the city was understood to be significantly deprived, but this was used as a method to show why people in the city were so attracted to American ideals in the first place. Nik Cohn's polemic history of rock 'n' roll was one of the first attempts to provide a broad history of the movement. He devoted a considerable amount of time to explaining Liverpool and doing so in a manner that emphasised the city's working class, provincial nature:

Liverpool is a strange town, it gets obsessed by everything it does. It is a seaport and it's made up of different races...it has a certain black style of its own, a private strength and awareness, real violence, and it is also grim, very much so. After the pubs close down, everyone stands out on corners and watches what happens and has nowhere much to go. Clubs are small, sweaty and dumb. Kids don't move by themselves or they get nussed by the guerrillas. This is America in England: a night out ends almost inevitably with a punch on the nose.<sup>475</sup>

Here the combination that Frankie Connor eluded to comes to the fore – that of simultaneously describing it as 'grim' and also recognising the fact that it was a 'seaport made up of different races'. With Connor, however, the focus fell down on describing the American influence as a positive one. For Cohn, it is unquestionably negative. Far from using America as a touchstone for Liverpool's outward-looking nature, Cohn instead uses it to 'explain' the city's supposed insularity and violence. Where earlier representations of Liverpool's ties with America play on merchant sailors bringing home collections of records for their friends to share or of young men crowding round a radio to listen to Little Richard on Radio Luxembourg, Cohn instead suggests that the city's 'edge' is America, manifested in a violent, bored, strange conurbation in the North West of England. Notable too is his description of Liverpool's lack of purpose – a place

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<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>475</sup> Nik Cohn, *Awop* p. 143.

where people stand on corners with nowhere else to go and if they do, it is only to small, dumb clubs. Liverpool is depicted as a place where there is little purpose and that its obsessions are the only thing that carries it. Again, this goes beyond class. Working-class constructs need not necessarily bemoan a lack of purpose. A lack of purpose underpins Cohn's criticism here – 'everyone has nowhere much to go'. Rather than a focus on Liverpool as working-class city, it is rather one on Liverpool as meandering, aimless, and drifting. The city has no purpose other than violence and this, in Cohn's eyes, is represented as 'America in a city'.

Cohn's work is an intentionally provocative and inflammatory polemic so should not be considered as the definitive, academic history of rock and roll but it provides, nevertheless, an alternative view – how the supposed closeness of Liverpool with America did not always result in positive, out-looking comparisons being made. The influence of Cohn's book was considerable, it is still cited as an authority on the history of the rock and roll movement.

The class-based framework of Liverpool's relationship with the United States gained further support in a twenty-year retrospective for *Rolling Stone* magazine. In it, the argument was made (albeit with sole reference to the Beatles) that the lived environment of Liverpool made it more likely to absorb American musical forms than other parts of the country, particularly London:

The Beatles' style and outlook were so strongly influenced by American pop culture that had they been unable to prove themselves here [the United States] they would have regarded themselves as failures...I think of the Beatles as an exuberant and freakish variety of this often misery-minded and right-wing type. The Beatles were working class Liverpudlians, spiritual refugees from a neglected corner of a provincial town. Their fantasy life (dollars, hot rods, reefers, groupies) was fuelled by America. If they had been Londoners or middle class – Mick Jagger was both – they would have put on the kind of snotty metropolitan contempt that smug, big-city Europeans pretend they have for the States.<sup>476</sup>

As with Frankie Connor's testimony, America is constructed here as an escape route from an avowedly working-class city. The references to provincialism in this evidence, however, point towards 'exceptional' tones that are not present in that testimony. By representing the Beatles as 'spiritual refugees from a neglected corner of a provincial town', the journalist here contributes to some of the tropes that set Liverpool apart.

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<sup>476</sup> *Rolling Stone* 16 February 1984

Liverpool was, of course, not apart in being provincial, but without considerations of other cities in this particular piece of discourse, it is presented as so being. This is especially true when compared to London. For young Liverpudlians, fantasy lives were dominated by dreams of America. It should be noted that the close association of 'Londoners' and 'middle class' here is done to create social and cultural difference, as if people from Liverpool were not the former and could not be the latter. This is not to say that the Beatles were looked down upon for their reverence of America, the author here holds most of his scorn for the 'snotty metropolitan contempt' that he believed was at the centre of Mick Jagger's supposed lack of admiration for the United States. It is, however, a clear attempt to paint this reverence within the paradigm of social class. Instructive here, too, is the suggestion that the Beatles were 'working-class Liverpudlians'. This is not true. John Lennon and Paul McCartney were from middle-class homes in the middle-class area of Allerton. Only Ringo Starr could realistically be called 'working-class', coming as he did from the Welsh Streets area in Dingle. Whatever the childhood backgrounds of each individual Beatle, the piece is incredibly valuable as an example of how tropes about Liverpool can feed into each other and get reproduced with little to no considerations of difference or context.

The class paradigm works in combination with considerations of what Liverpudlian music was supposedly like. Attempts to explain the 'Liverpool sound' would often revolve around making the city sound like it and the United States were a somewhat inevitable match. Descriptions of the music as 'rough' or 'rocking' held connotations when it came to explain the wider social and economic environment that Liverpool operated in and were often used to contribute to understanding of how Liverpool and the United States had this cultural alignment.

The aforementioned Kingsize Taylor was emphatic in his description of the Liverpool Sound as comprising music that could be called 'rough' or 'rocking'. In explaining the impact that American music had on him, he first suggested that the music in the British charts was "soft, glam rock 'n' roll you know – Cliff Richard, Billy Fury...very soft stuff – no arse kickers amongst them when you think about it".<sup>477</sup> However he placed America right at the centre of his perception of what made the Liverpool Sound what it was:

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<sup>477</sup> Oral testimony from Ted 'Kingsize' Taylor, recorded by the author, 10 January 2017.

You get a Little Richard number and he's carrying a twelve-piece band and you've got two guitars, bass and drums. So somehow you've got to create a sound that would carry that number. This Liverpool Sound is unique because it carries a heavy sound with little instruments.<sup>478</sup>

Those such as Cliff Richard and Billy Fury were, in Taylor's estimation, both 'soft'. It was the injection of American sounds, such as those of Little Richard (though Taylor mentioned many more acts in the course of his testimony) that gave Merseybeat its edge or made it 'arse-kicking'.

*American Explanations and Merseybeat: Conclusions:*

The many influences on the Merseybeat period explained above are representative of the variety of explanations used to 'explain' the American influence on the phenomenon as a whole. The factors discussed here, the musicological approaches, the country and western connection, the Liverpool accent, performance, amateurism, and the class angles, can be difficult to link together in a coherent manner. However, this is representative of the positioning of the United States within Liverpoolian popular culture and thought. There is no singular over-arching theme that can tie the above together, rather the Liverpool-America connection is one that necessarily avoids clear definition – it is a collection of different strands, some pertaining to identities, others more tangible and measurable.

The promotion of class, for example, was crucial in Pells' and Lyons' own analyses of the penetrative influence of the United States on working-class Britons in the 1950s and 60s and should be understood in this context. It is clear that young Liverpoolians were drawn to American musical styles (although not all were working-class) but where Lyons' argument surrounding young working-class Britons cannot be applied to Liverpool is on the issue of class alone. Class, in and of itself, cannot explain the Liverpoolian call-to-arms to start playing American music en masse and create the Merseybeat movement as a consequence. It had to be accompanied by something, as aforementioned, more tangible. Liverpool was clearly imbued with certain characteristics, geographic accidents, and economic realities that directed it towards America and America towards it and it is for this reason that the American influence on the Merseybeat period has to go beyond economic class.

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<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*

The newspapers at the time did not consider this with any attempt to reach a definitive answer. The scattergun approach – it was at different times the accent, the style, the social and economic status, and so on – was not conducive to providing a clear answer to the question as to why Liverpool was so affected by this music. While class is important, the unique realities of Liverpool in the 1950s and early 1960s offer more guidance in understanding why the city was affected in this way.

The focus of this thesis is, however, Liverpool's Exceptionalism. To return to Belchem, who elevates Liverpool's reputation as the 'New York of Europe' by way of being indicative of the city's supposed transatlantic purview, the above evidence provides views unconsidered and others unlinked. For Belchem, the 'accent exceedingly rare' is a crucial part of the Liverpoolian cultural and social jigsaw puzzle. The idea that it could be a key facet in the reproduction of American popular music forms, however, is novel. On class, Belchem's main contention is that it was the "mentality of the slummy co-exist[-ing] with a broader culture, a seafaring cosmopolitanism"<sup>479</sup> that resulted in the city supposedly being more receptive to American music forms. Tony Lane's identification of a 'democratic temperament' carried class connotations, too. There is, as already established, a degree of truth to these assertions but they cannot be considered alone.

The above, rather than showcasing the variety of ways in which America influenced the Merseybeat phenomenon rather displays how difficult it was for members of the press, and the interviewees in retrospect, to provide a convincing answer on why Liverpool was apparently so susceptible to these musical forms. The myriad explanations are understandable in this form of historical analysis. In the absence of something tangible, the reaching for any purportedly acceptable explanation is in clear evidence above. Whether this is convincing evidence of Liverpool's exceptionalism is highly questionable.

The Cunard Yank experience, however, is illustrative both in providing something more tangible. Yet this also suffers from the same problems of definition and collective myth-making. Though the Cunard Yanks existed, their place within the Merseybeat phenomenon, and the concomitant exceptionalism of that phenomenon, are to be considered next.

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<sup>479</sup> Belchem, *Merseypride*, p. 60.

## **Section 2: The Cunard Yanks**

The evidence thus far, therefore, points towards a definite understanding of the influence of the United States on different aspects of Liverpudlian lives. Often, however, this is too vague to be of substantial use – referring to artists that affected the lives of these young musicians is helpful, but does not do a lot to either define, or not, Liverpool’s supposed exceptionalism. Although references to the port and “direct connections with Harlem” are more helpful, the lack of specific understanding, particularly in the press, does not provide a clear picture of this issue. There was very clearly an understanding of *an* American influence, but the constituent parts of it are so loose and poorly explained that it is hard to construct a clear explanation from them. With that being said, underpinning all of the above is the concept of Liverpool’s early access to records from the United States. Without this early access, none of the above factors in ‘explaining’ Merseybeat would have been explained. This ‘early access’, however, is enormously contentious.

### *Liverpool’s early access to American records*

From the earliest stages of their lives, so the argument goes, Liverpudlians were given access to American records and American musical forms and this was often used as evidence by the interviewees of the inspiration that these artists provided. It is not the simple concept of ‘access’ that privileged Liverpudlian performers, however, it was the early access, or unique access, to these records that has been used to explain the Merseybeat phenomenon. The American connection is crucial in this analysis. To take it one step further, it was not just the concept of ‘early access’ in and of itself, but the ‘early access’ to *American* records – a direct consequence of Liverpool’s geography and mercantile history. This, coupled with vague ideas surrounding ‘performance’, gave the city and its performers, in popular memory at least, a method by which they were able to contextualise and justify the Merseybeat phenomenon.

American music undoubtedly played a key role in the early lives of the interviewees for this research and it is on this that a number of ‘exceptional’ themes hang. Every interviewee listed American influences on their music, and most depicted this as a factor that was aided by their coming from Liverpool – as though the city provided them with a grounding in American styles as a matter of course. This ‘early access’ concept manifested itself mostly through the mythology (or not) of the ‘Cunard Yanks’. This

section, therefore, will focus on the degree to which this early access to records was portrayed in the press and in the interviews, however it came about.

The press provided copious evidence of the ways in which Liverpool was presented as being substantially, and uniquely, influenced by America and Americans. Bob Wooller, compere of the Cavern Club, made explicit reference to the suggestion that Liverpool was ahead of the curve, "Liverpool is a jungle now of agents, managers, groups' he said. "The city, being a port, has become more Americanised than the inland places, even London. The R&B trend caught on here first...as did skiffle in those years back when the Beatles and Gerry and the others had tea-chests and washboards. Lonnie Donegan was high priest. Local accents made it easy for Liverpudlians to copy".<sup>480</sup> Efforts were continuously made to make the belief that Liverpool 'got there first' absolutely clear. Americanisation, it is claimed, came to Liverpool well before any of the 'inland' places, especially London. Rhythm and blues came to Liverpool first. The idea that Liverpool was uniquely positioned to take advantage of this access, therefore, was established very early.

In the same newspaper Maurice Woolf, then a Sales Director for Rose Morris & Co (an instrument store), provided his own slant on Liverpool's US connection. In Woolf's piece, he changes direction from Wooller by being quite explicit about Liverpool's own role in the growing number of groups and artists coming from the city:

Why does Liverpool lead the rest? Is it because she is an Atlantic fort with numbers of merchant seamen bringing the 'message' of rock and roll from the States? Partly. There was always a great tradition of music on Merseyside – not merely to listen to, but to perform. Whatever the reasons, the results are here for all to see – the largest number, by far, of active groups (both Rock and Country and Western) in Britain and growing all the time.<sup>481</sup>

The two quotations show that the Liverpool-America link had become recognised and established in the discourse of the phenomenon. Woolf and Wooller both took wide-ranging views of the city as a whole. The proliferation of a wide range of different beat groups was representative of the city's imbued and essential character. The link here is explicitly made – that Liverpool's position on the Atlantic allowed merchant seamen to bring back 'the message' of rock 'n' roll to Liverpool. The description of Liverpool as an Atlantic fort brings up a key image for both Liverpool and the Merseybeat movement.

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<sup>480</sup> *New Record Mirror*, August 10, 1963.

<sup>481</sup> *Mersey Beat* – March 28 – April 11 1963.

Vital, too, is the emphasis on how important performance was in Merseyside music. The aforementioned appeal of Merseybeat, certainly in its infancy, was as much about the physical appeal of those on stage as the sound they produced. This is a clear echo of Wooller's earlier comments, namely the focus on the "excitement - both physical and aural" that the Beatles provided. It is never clear where the splinter here is between what is Liverpool and what is America, but Woolf makes clear, too, that there is one. The American link is only 'partly' responsible for the phenomenon, the rest is Liverpool-centric with regard to its 'great tradition' for listening to and performing music. Tying this supposed Liverpoolian tendency to perform with the "largest number of active groups in Britain" worked to portray Liverpool as a city that was uniquely placed to experience the musical success it had and, as importantly, to explain why this was the case. The performative aspect, too, was crucial.

In a piece in 1963 attempting to tie Liverpool with the idea of being a 'frontier for rock', Woolf, went further than before, making clear that if "New Orleans deserves to be linked with jazz in the New World, then Liverpool should be the name associated with rock 'n' roll in Britain."<sup>482</sup> This shows a clear attempt to associate Liverpool with American places that had become renowned for providing a single type of music. There is no particular evidence of a direct link between New Orleans and Liverpool, but the attempt to frame the city *as American cities had already been framed* is indicative of the mind-set that pervaded writing on Liverpool at this time. The frameworks for attempts to explain this phenomenon very often, therefore, revolved around the United States.

Chief amongst the members of the music press keen to tie Liverpool to America was the local paper devoted to the Liverpool scene, *Mersey Beat*. *Mersey Beat* was a newspaper founded by Bill Harry, then a man in his early twenties, who had been classmates with John Lennon and Stuart Sutcliffe. It is undoubtedly the paper that shows attitudes typical of the 'exceptional' Liverpool mentality. This is quite understandable of course, given that it was a Liverpool paper written by a man close to the Liverpool scene's most prominent actors. The term 'exceptionalism' is obviously never used, but aspects of what has come to be seen as Liverpool exceptionalism are certainly on show. Harry often railed against what he perceived to be Liverpool's marginal position, particularly defining it against London. This will be looked at later.

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<sup>482</sup> *Mersey Beat* - March 28 - April 11 1963.



Harry's writing for the paper consisted of uniquely thorough coverage of the Liverpool scene at the time and provides a good insight into the mentality surrounding what was a firmly provincial phenomenon mutating into something of a worldwide craze.

Harry commented on the specific influences that the Merseybeat phenomenon had, though he stopped short of suggesting that Liverpool was a city able to create new forms of music – it was derivative. Making the point that Liverpool was clearly behind the United States when it came to music, but that it was ahead of Britain:

The Liverpool Sound owes much to the influence of American artists such as Chuck Berry, The Miracles etc. It also finds its roots with the early American rockers such as Jerry Lee Lewis, Little Richard and Gene Vincent. Liverpool, it seems, is a few years behind the advancement of US music, but also a few years ahead of British best.<sup>483</sup>

Harry's comments therefore suggest that Liverpool occupied an interstitial space between the US and the UK, in not being innovative enough to yet break into the American market but simultaneously being ahead of the UK one. The success of the 'British invasion' would soon take hold, however, and this suggestion would seem harsh on Liverpool bands, particularly after 9 February 1964 and the Beatles' infamous appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show. Without explicitly saying why this would be the case, Harry places Liverpool in a space where he suggests that groups from the city were ahead of the rest of Britain but, crucially, behind the United States. This does not suggest essentialism. Rather, the 'early access' paradigm was crucial in his analysis and reflective of the exceptionalism of the city, relative to the rest of the United Kingdom.

The oral histories are exceptionally clear with the extent of this inspiration. Mal Jefferson, founder of Liverpool group the Mastersounds, gave his recollection of his early family life and the effect that American culture had on him:

Even at home we'd play Al Jolson and a lot of American records. We had Louis Jordan – the v disc. V for Victory! They were 78 records of jump jive, which was unusual. Heavy figures and boppy. Real boppy stuff. Yeah they were all American, the only British one we had was [George] Formby who, like Gerry and the Pacemakers, was separate and unique and not like anyone else. He had his own niche.<sup>484</sup>

The American influence, therefore, took hold from a young age. Jefferson would later describe how his father would bring back American records from the ship he worked on – a key method by which records were disseminated in Liverpool and, of course, an area

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<sup>483</sup> Mersey Beat – October 25 – November 7 1963.

<sup>484</sup> Oral testimony from Mal Jefferson, recorded by the author, 12 July 2017.

of contested memory to be covered later. For this, however, the American childhood influence is clear. Jefferson, therefore, claimed that the only English record that his family seemed to own, or play, was one by George Formby.

Brian Jones was similarly effusive with explaining his exposure to American music in his early life. On being asked about his early exposure to American musical forms, he outlined his influences as follows: “during the period of time that I was...the music scene when I was young. It was all like the Shadows and Cliff Richard and all that sort of stuff. All the white rock and roll people, like Elvis and Billy Fury. I wasn’t really into that at all. I found it very boring. I was listening to more to Atlantic stuff. Like early Ray Charles, Laverne Baker and all that - the early soul stuff. Ray Charles was the king of soul.”<sup>485</sup> Turning his nose up at Cliff Richard and the Shadows, Jones was clear in his explanation of American artists being key in his musical inspirations.

It was not always the case, however, that artists wholly agreed on the allegedly American nature of the Mersey phenomenon. Some artists attempted to paint the music coming out of Liverpool as unique to the city, particularly those acts that wished to distance themselves from the broader ‘Mersey Sound’/‘Liverpool Sound’, the definition of which varied enormously dependent on who was discussing it. Billy J Kramer, of Billy J Kramer and the Dakotas, was keen to paint Liverpool as having sole possession of the sound that had become enormously popular in the United Kingdom at this time:

That’s what I call it – ‘Liverpool Blues’. That’s a new expression for our music isn’t it? It’s not just commercial, it’s an entirely different sound. And regardless of what people say, this sound – mine or anyone else’s – is not like that of Bo Diddley, Chuck Berry and other American rhythm and blues merchants. It’s ours and the only similarity is that maybe in the very beginning we got the idea from across the water.<sup>486</sup>

Whilst Kramer here acknowledges that the US played a role, he relegates it to something that would have happened long before the peak of the movement in the early-to-mid 1960s. It seems disingenuous to suggest that there were few similarities between the work of Berry, Diddley et al and the Mersey groups and then simultaneously claim that they were the foundation of what the groups based themselves on – of ‘getting the idea from across the water’. Kramer made further attempts to distance what he considered to be Liverpool music from the American tradition:

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<sup>485</sup> Oral testimony from Brian Jones, recorded by the author, 6 September 2017.

<sup>486</sup> *DISC*, 18 May 1963.

It's difficult pointing out where the differences lie. But I stand by my original statement that our kind of R 'n' B is different from the American. It's a Liverpool Blues. Yes that's it. It has a different sound and a different approach to it all. But, as far as I'm concerned, that doesn't make it any less authentic. Why shouldn't there be different styles inside the R 'n' B field? Liverpool R 'n' B is different. You've only got to listen to the records that come from there. But it's still R 'n' B.<sup>487</sup>

Kramer's objections here still fit this music within American frameworks. His claim that the Liverpool interpretation of this sound was so far removed from the American original may well have been true – the combination of Liverpool performance and American music was therefore such that the Liverpool surpassed the American. His objection, therefore, was not that this phenomenon was something that sprung up organically out of Liverpool alone, but that the Liverpoolian interpretation of this music had changed enormously from its initial inspiration.

Mal Jefferson, in interview, provided an idea to question this suggestion by Kramer. By suggesting that there was nothing innately special about Liverpoolians themselves that allowed them to dominate the British charts for so long, he put forward the idea rather that they had been fortunate enough to reside in a city with a port that apparently provided a considerable amount of American music. This, coupled with a ferocious appetite to perform, is used to explain the Liverpool Sound.

Blue Jeans never wrote any [songs]. Undertakers never wrote any. Just did American stuff. I don't think they had the musical ability to write it. Maybe we did and never got round to it, couldn't be bothered. Why bother when the public want to hear American songs done somewhere near to what they hear on record? That's what they wanted to hear.<sup>488</sup>

Notable here is his criticism of Liverpool groups' ability to write music. He would later in the interview say, "it was just a question of everybody having a go at their own style. When it came to writing their own numbers there weren't many, apart from the Beatles, who did. The *This is Merseybeat* album with a lot of the groups writing their own numbers is terrible".<sup>489</sup> Therefore, Jefferson went to the other extreme to Kramer – rather than the Merseybeat being a strict product of Liverpool, and of the particular conditions in the city at the time, when given more leeway to produce something 'original', it is his contention that the groups faded away. The different times that these

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<sup>487</sup> *New Record Mirror*, 22 June 1963.

<sup>488</sup> Oral testimony from Mal Jefferson, recorded by the author, 12 July 2017.

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid.*

conversations took place must be considered – Kramer was, of course, speaking in 1963 at the peak of the movement, Jefferson in 2017, with the colossal benefit of hindsight. The nature of the sources affects this, too – Kramer’s need to define the movement as unique to Liverpool would have been more pressing in a press interview in 1963, rather than Jefferson’s reflections over fifty years later in a one-on-one interview.

When pushed further, Jefferson agreed with the suggestion that it was only Liverpool’s early exposure to American music, coupled with a resolute determination to play it well, that allowed music from Liverpool to become so popular at this moment in time. The port allowed the music to come in, but there was nothing essential within Liverpudlians that made this phenomenon happen. The good fortune of place of birth, coupled with months and years of hard work in Hamburg or elsewhere, allowed Liverpudlians to play American music in a manner that the British public recognised from the original American records. It is therefore easier to understand the short-term nature of the Mersey Sound, then. In Jefferson’s formulation, Liverpool had a head start. Once the rest of Britain caught up then Liverpool fell back to its place as another British city.

The sum of the above is a mixed picture of resolute American influence on the one hand, coupled with a lack of conviction on the other. What it does not do is provide a clear-cut picture of precisely how the American influence directly affected the Merseybeat movement. It is largely a collection of vague claims and recollections that the American influence was in some way important or existed in some manner. The breadth of the evidence is certainly noteworthy, but nowhere does it consist of a deep explanation or understanding of precisely how the city came to be influenced so clearly by American musical forms. On the question of fact as to whether Liverpool clearly was affected by these forms, it must be said, there is no doubt. The city was, but the explanations are often quite lacking. The name-droppings of influences are exactly that – imprecise recollections of youth, in the case of oral histories, or contemporary attempts to try and ‘explain’ a phenomenon in order to satiate a reading audience that was desperate for any kind of development. The final sub-section, here, will examine the degree to which the city’s American influence can be understood through a case study of the Cunard Yanks – where the best chance of vague influences crystallising into something more lie.

The Cunard Yanks occupy a position of legend within the Merseybeat movement, historiography, and popular discourse. It is an area of hotly contested memory. It was certainly the topic on which the most direct opinions were provided in interviews for this research – either relegating their importance to an irrelevance or being so adamant about their influence to the extent that specific names of people who were supposedly Cunard Yanks were remembered and offered up as examples of how people got records in to the city. The reliance on America for the latest in fashion trends was true of Liverpool's relationship with America before Merseybeat, the most notorious of which was the connection via these oft-covered Cunard Yanks.

### *The Mythos of the Cunard Yanks*

It is easy to see why the Cunard Yank story is one that draws so much attention. It penetrates a particular aspect of Liverpoolian identity and, at its core, provides the kind of story that would be extremely attractive – ordinary, working-class, young men sailing on ships to the land of profound opportunity, away from their supposedly more mundane lives at home, and bringing back (amongst other things) records that provoked the first great British popular music phenomenon. Though the Cunard Yank story exists in the wider Merseybeat one, it has been systematically documented in only a handful of places. The Cunard Yanks are referenced in fits and starts in a wide range of books, programmes, and in other such media do with Liverpool and Liverpool music. Two such examples of the place that the Cunard Yanks occupy within the accepted story of Merseybeat is the contention that the transatlantic shipping links between Liverpool and New York allowed, “the Cunard Yanks [to bring] home records not available in Britain...sung by still obscure names...[which] pounded through the terraced back streets each Saturday night”.<sup>490</sup> The second example, provided by Sara Cohen, suggested that they were not so mythological as to make it possible to deny their existence. They certainly existed and were, according to Cohen, “ship cooks and waiters who were not unionised and had an irreverent attitude to work. Many of them, for example, jumped ship and stayed for a while in various parts of America...they also adopted a manner and style that was non-conformist in relation to mainstream British

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<sup>490</sup> P. Norman quoted in I. Inglis, ‘The Beatles are coming!’: Conjecture and conviction in the myth of Kennedy, America, and the Beatles’, *Popular Music and Society*, 24:2, (July 2008), p. 106.

popular culture, and that helped to distinguish them within the city and give them cultural status".<sup>491</sup>

The presence of a number of liner companies in Liverpool, notably Cunard and Canadian Pacific, led to an enterprise where, so the story goes, those merchant sailors whom travelled to the United States and brought music records (amongst other modern appliances and paraphernalia) back to Liverpool, either by request or in the hope that they could be sold on the mainland were called the Cunard Yanks. Liverpool's direct shipping connection to New York, it is claimed,<sup>492</sup> provided Liverpool with the very latest records well before the rest of the country was fortunate enough to listen to them and this is the key 'exceptional' aspect that supposedly set Liverpool apart. The Cunard Yanks are foundational figures in the mythology of Merseybeat, being a group who have been represented as ahead of the curve and almost the epitome of an enterprising Liverpudlian spirit that put the port and the relationship with the United States at its core. The Cunard Yanks have been held up as pioneers in importing American music (both black and not) at a time when much of it was not acceptable (or worse even, legal) in the United States. It is not clear, however, on the extent to which these Cunard Yanks thought of themselves as a unified group, whether there was any clear plan and intent behind the movement and, most importantly, the causal link between them and the Merseybeat phenomenon.

The most effective and dedicated documentation of the Cunard Yank phenomenon, however, is a programme created for the BBC in 2007 entitled *Liverpool's Cunard Yanks*. This documentary offers a number of the explanations that have become widely accepted in any analysis of the Merseybeat movement. Focussing on four Cunard Yanks (John Hibbert, Billy Harrison, Richie Barton, and John Gilmour) the programme does not overly privilege the importation of records into Liverpool. Rather, they were situated within a much wider idea of bringing goods back to the city, no matter what those goods were.<sup>493</sup> The direct lines of causation from the Cunard Yanks to groups like the Beatles are also similarly indistinct. Relying heavily on ideas like "influence" and "bringing back records before they were released six-to-eight months later", the

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<sup>491</sup> Sara Cohen, *Beyond the Beatles*, p. 82.

<sup>492</sup> This occurs repeatedly in any musical historiography of the city, but can be seen in the national press as far back as 1964, where David Griffiths of the *New Record Mirror* claimed that Liverpool enjoyed a "direct connection to Harlem – small wonder that R 'n' B has such a firm grip on Scouse youngsters".

<sup>493</sup> Among the items that were claimed to have been brought back were high chairs, fridges, reel-to-reel players, movie cameras, handbags, dresses, coats, juke boxes, and records.

programme's only tangible connection to the Merseybeat period is that established between a guitar brought back by one of those Cunard Yanks and it being sold to George Harrison. Furthermore, the music brought back was so diverse that it is impossible to divine what the precise influence was, other than a general immersion in American music – “in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Cunard Yanks were bringing back Broadway musicals, blues, country and western, rhythm and blues, and jazz”.

Finally, perfectly encapsulating the controversial nature of the entire concept itself and the two main debates, the programme finishes with two direct and competing quotations. First, “influence is a strange thing. If anybody says we had no influence, let them think that. I don't know. I don't know what influence we had. We never tried to influence anybody, we just brought back music that we liked. A lot of it was different” from Richie Barton, providing a clearly sceptical take. In contrast, “whoever said we had no influence on the music...unbelievable”,<sup>494</sup> from Vinnie McArdle, a waiter on the Cunard ships. He was then followed himself by Tony Wailey, a historian and former seafarer, who explains the idea of a longer social and cultural heritage being the method that should be prioritised in any analysis of the Cunard Yanks: “when we talk about the Beatles, we have to talk about their family backgrounds, in the sense of their fathers going away to sea and the notion of guitars in the sense that this is what defined Liverpool. The loud guitar, the brash guitar, the movement. George Harrison's father was a waiter on the ships. John Lennon's father was the archetypal Liverpool catering staff – could do a turn, could sing, could dance, ended up in New York. All of this musical background, combined with the idea of this being a city by the sea, on the edge of the Atlantic, next stop New York...”. The contrast, therefore, between the nebulous concept of direct, somewhat measurable “influence” and a wider, social and cultural heritage that is far harder to effectively define, is the key one for the Cunard Yank concept. The material gathered for this research is to be understood through these paradigms.

As Cohen suggested, the very least that can be said is that the Cunard Yanks existed. Attempts to link the Cunard Yank movement with Merseybeat tend to be found in places where analysis of it is not that deep. For example Belchem and MacRaild did so when writing on Liverpool's cosmopolitanism, “the presence of smart-suited, style-

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<sup>494</sup> *Liverpool's Cunard Yanks*, Souled Out Films, Dir. Dave Cotterill (2007): <https://www.bfi.org.uk/films-tv-people/4ce2b8a32362d>.

setting Cunard Yanks (stewards on the transatlantic run with the latest US releases) set Liverpool simultaneously ahead and apart amid the austerity of the immediate post-war years, preparing the way for the great Merseybeat explosion of the 1960s".<sup>495</sup> Peter North's use of Liverpool as a case study in an examination of urbanism referred to "seamen on the transatlantic liners, known locally as the 'Cunard Yanks' would bring back the consumer durables and rock and roll music that forged Merseybeat in the 1960s".<sup>496</sup> No attempts were made to examine precisely how the Cunard Yanks laid the way for the Merseybeat phenomenon, it just seems to be accepted as true. Such is the strength of this idea within the Merseybeat mythology that the 2010 Sam Taylor-Wood film *Nowhere Boy* featured John Lennon being handed a record by a Cunard Yank.

This is not without reason, however. Certain members of the Beatles and their entourage explicitly played up Liverpool's maritime association with America. Ringo Starr is on record as saying that "we were very lucky coming from Liverpool because it was a port and it seemed that half of Liverpool was in the Merchant Navy. All these records were coming from America, so you could find out about Arthur Alexander and people like that."<sup>497</sup> This kind of experience is far from uncommon and is repeated in the press articles and interviews at the time. John Lennon gave similar weight to this assertion, "Liverpool is cosmopolitan. It's where the sailors would come home on the ships with the blues records from America...we were hearing old funky blues records in Liverpool that people across Britain or Europe had never heard about".<sup>498</sup> This recognition of the role of American artists, particularly on the Beatles, shows the importance that Liverpool groups placed on their connection with America. Cynthia Lennon, John Lennon's first wife, recalled Lennon and McCartney's school obsessions, "I remember they were both so keen and enthusiastic, not about school, but music: guitars and the latest Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley and Buddy Holly".<sup>499</sup> The same artists come up regularly in interviews and opinion columns from the time.

The interview evidence provides a mixed picture. The first set of interviews presented here provided answers that were incomplete or unsatisfactory. Mal Jefferson, for example, was highly critical of those who suggested that the Cunard Yank idea may

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<sup>495</sup> Belchem and MacRaild, 'Cosmopolitan Liverpool' in Belchem, (ed), *Liverpool 800* p. 388.

<sup>496</sup> P. North, 'Unsustainable Urbanism? Cities, Climate Change and Resource Depletion: A Liverpool Case Study' in *Geography Compass*, Vol 4, Issue 9, (September 2010), pp. 1378-9.

<sup>497</sup> Ringo Starr in Du Noyer, *Liverpool: Wondrous Place*, p. 61.

<sup>498</sup> John Lennon quoted in *Ibid.* p. 61.

<sup>499</sup> C. Lennon, *A Twist of Lennon*, in *The Beatles Literary Anthology*, (London: Plexus 2004) p. 16.



exist more in the imagination than in reality, by suggesting that those suggestions on the topic were mere 'hear say'. With that in mind, Jefferson privileged the experiences of the Cunard Yanks and made quite clear that he believed they played a vital role in promoting American music on Merseyside: "people talk about the Cunard Yanks and it is a valid expression. People say they didn't exist...well it's very strange Dad came back from New York on one of the trips and gave me three or four acetates: Big Bill Broonzy, Memphis Slim and McKinley Morganfield".<sup>500</sup> The specific nature of Jefferson's recollection (his father was an interim captain of the Empress of Canada) seems to provide clear evidence to support the idea of sailors coming back with records for Liverpudlian consumption. The three artists named also add to the impression that Liverpool was a particular recipient of the sounds that laid the groundwork for the Merseybeat – Morganfield is better known as Muddy Waters and is oft-referred to as a key influence on Liverpool blues bands. With this being said, Jefferson's recollection is not one that one would traditionally associate with a Cunard Yank. The Cunard Yanks, it is suggested, were not ship captains but, rather, ordinary, usually young, working-class Liverpudlians. Although good evidence to showcase how records were brought into the city, it is perhaps not the strongest with regard to the actual Cunard Yanks themselves. Ozzie Yue made similar claims:

Liverpool was the city it was and people used to be able to get sort of American Chess records and things like that. You used to be able to [get them]...which is one of the reasons why the bands here used to play more obscure numbers than everywhere else because of the Cunard thing. The Cunard Yanks, they were the ones who used to bring all the [records over]...plus the fact that we had the American airbase here.<sup>501</sup>

Ozzie's recollection of the Cunard Yank experience seems to be less certain than Jefferson's. He did not provide clear examples of artists that influenced him via the ships going to and from America, but he did refer to various artists that influenced him in particular. This recollection, therefore, falls more into the hear say category – his inability to rely on specific instances do not help the Cunard Yank cause significantly. His memories of the Cunard Yanks, but also of the American airbase at Burtonwood, however, add to the importance that America played within the cultural environment of Liverpool at the time. His explanation of the city being 'what it was' are instructive. With

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<sup>500</sup> Oral testimony from Mal Jefferson, recorded by the author, 12 July 2017.

<sup>501</sup> Oral testimony from Ozzie Yue, recorded by the author, 23 February 2016.

that being said, the American airbase is a separate issue to the Cunard Yanks – American military men stationed in Burtonwood, rather than Liverpudlians actively going to America to seek out these records to bring home.

Brian Jones undertook a similar endeavour. Upon being asked about specific memories of people bringing records back, he suggested: “uncles! People who were in the Merchant Navy going backwards and forwards...it was rhythm and blues and black music”. On being pressed about whether any of this music had not been released, Jones replied as follows, “there was stuff that was brought over that hadn’t been released. A good example was that my cousin came over from America – they had this record called Speedy Gonzales by Pat Boone and it hadn’t been released in this country, or in Germany. We got the record and started doing it – people thought it was wonderful”.<sup>502</sup> This specific recollection is helpful – although Jones was unclear as to the year in which he was able to get his hands on such a record.

There were accounts that were far more detailed, however. Faron Ruffley was adamant about the influence of the Cunard Yanks on both Liverpool and himself. Taking issue with Spencer Leigh and claiming that, “he was never even there, man”, Ruffley was clear on the country aspect of the Cunard Yanks, “it was country. In between Elvis, Pat Boone, you name anybody you can think of. You had Andy Williams. You had Perry Como, these kinds of people but that was all you had. They came back with country music. Was it just country? Well for me it was. Imagine getting that!”. Upon being asked where he first heard Chuck Berry and Little Richard, Faron claimed, “it came back from a Cunard Yank. He brought back Little Richard. Brought back Chuck Berry. It was [my friend] Billy Dunning, he was a steward”.<sup>503</sup> Notable here is how Ruffley’s account actually seems to confirm Brocken’s – that the Cunard Yank music tended to be country, rather than rock ‘n’ roll. Nevertheless, the mention of Little Richard brings this into question and the use of a specific name of that Cunard Yank, Billy Dunning, even more so. Ruffley’s evidence, therefore, does more to portray the phenomenon as one that personally affected him, rather than something that existed in the background and was generally *understood* rather than *experienced*. Ruffley, however, is the only interviewee that was able to provide this kind of evidence.

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<sup>502</sup> Oral testimony from Brian Jones, recorded by the author, 6 September 2017.

<sup>503</sup> Oral testimony from Faron Ruffley, recorded by the author, 6 September 2017.

John McNally of the Searchers contributed to explaining this phenomenon by articulating the way in which his early musical education was fundamentally formed by his experience as a Liverpudlian with familial connections to the sea and therefore American music:

Most people in Liverpool had some relation who went to sea, and could bring record imports in. My brother brought me Hank Williams records first of all and I started from there...he brought back the first Elvis ones, then Carl Perkins, then Buddy Holly long before they were released over here. I remember him coming over and saying he'd seen Elvis on the telly and Jerry Lee Lewis live.<sup>504</sup>

McNally's evidence, given to Spencer Leigh is, again, more specific. The clear recollection of a brother going to sea can be given more weight and credence than a general, vague understanding that the Cunard Yanks existed in some capacity.

Finally, Kingsize Taylor, held up by Spencer Leigh, among others, as being the epicentre of this Liverpudlian-American Merseybeat connection, articulated how he was able to get his hands on a range of American paraphernalia, starting with comic books, "I used to collect American comics and I used to have them sent from America because I was in an American comic club which I'd joined on the back of one I'd got from the docks – from Alan White, a bellboy on the Cunard boats, he brought home a Superman comic or whatever. Next to it was a record – Stacks Records – you could join them too. There were two of them on the back so I filled them both in, posted them to America. The comics were free, the records were free. The latest pre-release records...black music was forbidden on the radio in America at that time and so a way to promote Stacks was to ship them out all over the world for free".<sup>505</sup> The good fortune of joining a comic book club that happens to distribute records too is not conclusive proof of the existence of the Cunard Yanks, but Taylor went on to elaborate, "Alan used to bring records, [I] used to go to the Canning Dock and American sailors would come in and we'd say, 'have you got any records?'. Used to get them that way. We were getting pre-release stuff from America and of course, well I love their stuff and so on it went where we were rehearsing stuff going out and having a go at them on stage, doing them the way we do them and people [asked us] 'where did you get that from?'. [I would reply] 'Oh, I got it from America'".<sup>506</sup> Taylor's evidence is therefore two-pronged. First, the

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<sup>504</sup> J. McNally quoted in Leigh, *Twist and Shout*, p. 31.

<sup>505</sup> Oral testimony from Ted 'Kingsize' Taylor, recorded by the author, 10 January 2017.

<sup>506</sup> *Ibid.*

comic book subscription, a direct result of comic books lifted from a ship on a dock in Liverpool. Second, stemming from that, is his contention that he had contacts on the docks that provided him with early-release records. This is by far the strongest of the evidence in favour of the Cunard Yanks that was assembled for this research. The very specific references he made were done with the kind of specificity lacking in some of the other testimonies.

The criticism of the Cunard Yank idea fell into two categories. The first is that the sailors themselves brought back music that cannot be linked to the Merseybeat period – usually country. The second is that there were other ways of acquiring said music that made much more sense than acquiring them from sailors that had come back from the United States. Both of these arguments have been made by Spencer Leigh<sup>507</sup> and both appear in the interviews undertaken for this research.

With regard to specific musical influence, much has been made of the city's link with America. The prevalence of country and western music in the city led to Liverpool being known as the 'Nashville of the North'. Kenny Johnson, a long-established DJ and musician based in Liverpool, linked Merseybeat with this earlier phenomenon, "it was the same reason why Merseybeat started here; because of the seamen. We used to get the soul records and the rock and roll records long before anyone else got them just because we were here, and the sailors would bring them".<sup>508</sup> A practical reason sometimes overlooked, too, was the presence of the American air base at Burtonwood. Joe Butler, another local country DJ and musician, describes said base, "they used to have country on regularly there. They used to bring bands in from the States and various musicians went into the base. That and sailors bringing records home from the States were the biggest factors as to why it started in Liverpool."<sup>509</sup> The reasons for Liverpool's reputation as a centre for country and western music are beyond the scope of this study, but they serve as a helpful tool in recognising the same arguments were made of country, as they were of the rock and roll, that would later prove to be the inspiration for many Liverpool groups. Indeed, the influence that the transatlantic route had here becomes clearer as more groups are brought into focus. Even Spencer Leigh acknowledges that the influence of the Cunard Yanks cannot be discounted for country

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<sup>507</sup> Leigh, 'Growing up with the Beatles', in Leonard and Strachan, *Beat Goes On*, pp. 35-7

<sup>508</sup> Kenny Johnson quoted in McManus, *Nashville of the North* p. 2.

<sup>509</sup> Joe Butler quoted in *Ibid.* p. 4.

and western and 50s music in Liverpool, “though the Cunard Yank theory did apply to jazz records in the early 50s and to country and western music, I can’t find a single song in the Beatles’ repertoire that has come from a Cunard Yank”<sup>510</sup> but on a long-duree influence, he is not forthcoming.

The question as to whether the Cunard Yanks exist more in reality than in myth is a difficult one to answer. Whether it is something that has just become accepted as truth over time and repetition is hard to discern. Ian Inglis, for example, suggests that, “what the examples of the Cunard Yanks and Brian Epstein’s homosexuality indicate is that once a suitable explanation has been exposed and circulated – even though there may be little real evidence to support it – there is an unfortunate tendency to accept it absolutely and to disregard any other possible explanations”.<sup>511</sup> Spencer Leigh, the Merseybeat historian, has taken the view that the Cunard Yanks did not directly affect the Merseybeat phenomenon. He suggests (based off his own research) the records Mersey bands were covering that hit big in the charts had already been released in the UK. He suggests that, “Brian Epstein’s superbly stocked record shop, NEMS, was surely more significant and, indeed, is one of the luckiest factors in the Beatles’ story. Much has been made of the influence of the Cunard Yanks on Merseybeat, but there is no evidence that they brought in rare rock ‘n’ roll records from America. Believe me, I’ve tried my best to find it...although Liverpool groups recorded over 350 American covers, every one of the originals had been released in the UK”.<sup>512</sup> The place of the Cunard Yanks within the shared memory of Merseybeat cannot nevertheless be discarded. Leigh’s point refers to the specific records that were covered by Liverpool acts at the time. On the issue of Liverpool being a willing recipient of American musical influences, he offers no resistance. The Merseybeat promoter Sam Leach largely agreed with Leigh’s analysis, “nowhere in Britain was the new craze more popular than it was in Liverpool, but the seeds of Merseybeat were sown long before the arrival of rock ‘n’ roll. Many have claimed that merchant sailors on the regular Liverpool to New York runs, known as ‘Cunard Yanks’, were responsible, bringing the latest American records into the city. Take no notice. They were simply responding to the pleas of their younger, teenage siblings, desperate to get their hands on the latest sounds”.<sup>513</sup> The difference here

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<sup>510</sup> Leigh, ‘Growing up with the Beatles’, pp. 35-7.

<sup>511</sup> Inglis, *Beatles are Coming*, p. 106.

<sup>512</sup> Leigh, ‘Growing up with the Beatles’, p. 35.

<sup>513</sup> Sam Leach, *The Rocking City*, p. 22.

seems to be one of emphasis. Where Leach reads the argument of the Cunard Yanks to be one that assumes they intentionally brought these records to Liverpool to try and spread the music on offer, his own point merely emphasises the key role, whether by design or merely responding to demand, that these Cunard Yanks were of huge importance. Leigh, however, is adamant that no rare American rock 'n' roll records were brought in from America on ships.

The Cunard Yank paradigm was heavily questioned by a number of the interviewees. David Boyce, former drummer in the Roadrunners, takes a much more sceptical view of this prominent idea, siding more with the criticism that there were other, much more realistic, ways of acquiring these records. "Brian Epstein was very good at ordering stuff if you really wanted it. Going back to the arms full of American records coming in on the Cunard line, as it were, I never met anyone who got their records that way. I think...presumably you've talked to people who...I'd never heard the term 'Cunard Yank' until it was banded about in this context".<sup>514</sup> Boyce is adamant that the Cunard Yank idea was a convenient story that was created in the aftermath of the period rather than something essential to it. Central to this criticism is the idea that Brian Epstein's NEMS store was actually the main way in which these young Liverpoolians gained access to these records. The commitment of one ambitious Liverpoolian (and, possibly importantly, middle-class) entrepreneur is, perhaps, slightly less appealing to the wider Liverpool 'story' than that of enterprising young working-class sailors disappearing off to America, only to come back with arms full of new records to inspire the youth of Liverpool and carry them to national and international infamy. In many ways, Boyce may be correct. He also explicitly agrees with Leigh by referring to the same artists that crop up repeatedly in this question and saying that they had all been released in the UK. Boyce recalled his regular trips down to London and made the point of referring to Alexis Korner's influence alongside a specialist record shop in Charing Cross called Bow Bells.

Ozzie Yue, mentioned earlier with reference to his recollections of the Cunard Yank idea, was far more specific when describing how he actually got his own records. Per Yue, "I used to go to one record shop...they sort of always used to have a lot of imports, American imports, the shop used to be down the bottom, halfway down Mount

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<sup>514</sup> Oral testimony from David Boyce, recorded by the author, 27 January 2016.

Pleasant. I used to go in there and root through the albums, swap albums, and everything. Used to buy all the Chuck Berry, Muddy Waters and all those things”.<sup>515</sup> Yue, therefore, was far more able to describe his acquisition of records through shops, rather than a vague idea of hitherto unknown music filtering through the docks.

Chris Huston of the Undertakers offered his own experience by questioning the role of the Cunard Yanks as well. “We used to find our records on street markets in London, you know. Couldn’t get them in Liverpool – although some people have said the Cunard Yanks brought them all over.” Interestingly, Huston suggests that records were used as ballast on ships and that enterprising individuals would collect them and attempt to sell them on their stalls at the weekend. The likelihood of records being used as ballast seems to be low, however. He did provide an interesting piece of clarification by comparing the amount that a Liverpool-based salesman would have had available as compared to a vendor on Portobello Road in London. On the Cunard Yanks, however, Huston suggests that “you can’t discard it. But the people who didn’t get out of Liverpool, that was the only access. But more importantly what used to happen, we’d find records and you’d play them on stage at a gig and two weeks later five or six groups were doing them, you know. They’d learn them”.<sup>516</sup>

For Chris Huston and David Boyce, therefore, geography seems to play a key role in their interpretation of the Cunard Yank phenomenon. They were two people who had the wherewithal to travel down to London and they could recognise that there were many more ways that these records were coming into the country. Vitally, however, Huston also recognises that there would have been people without the ability to travel, who stayed in Liverpool, for whom access to these physical records may well have only come via these transatlantic links. And as Huston suggests, the subsequent performative aspect was absolutely crucial. It would not make sense that thousands of records came in via the port for the individual consumption of each member of each group but there is evidence of one person obtaining a record and then disseminating it via performance.

On performance, as aforementioned, Kingsize Taylor explained how he and a friend would get records off American sailors in the Canning Dock, but he also explained how the Beatles attended one of his shows and sat “in the front listening to our set and

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<sup>515</sup> Oral testimony from Ozzie Yue, recorded by the author, 23 February 2016.

<sup>516</sup> Oral testimony from Chris Huston, recorded by the author, 3 November 2016.

they took a line each”.<sup>517</sup> Jefferson independently remembered this particular moment and described how “when I was at the Iron Door later on, he [Taylor] was singing Dizzy Miss Lizzie and Lennon and McCartney were there writing the words down. I was there watching them. Twist and Shout – they nicked his arrangement of it, not the Isley Brothers”.<sup>518</sup> Care should of course be taken with this kind of recollection, especially owing to the attractive nature of a story suggesting that Lennon and McCartney were well-renowned song pilferers, but it is illustrative of how networks could be created, based off one man’s ability to obtain records, to allow the dissemination of American music throughout a city. The point, therefore, is that the Cunard Yank phenomenon may not have been something that directly affected a large number of Liverpoolians, but one method amongst many that provided an initial impetus to the rock ‘n’ roll scene in Liverpool, but that the main driver of the dissemination of this music was undoubtedly the practice, and performance of, these records, however they were attained.

On the chronological problem of the Cunard Yanks, Michael Brocken is highly critical of the suggestion that they brought anything other than country or jazz music back. He claims that, “the romantic notion of the Cunard Yanks bringing home armfuls of (e.g.) Little Richard records is favoured for the emblematic and romantic status it brings to Liverpool. The Cunard Yanks story is just that – a story, and tales such as these are the very substance of urban myths and legends. Although Cunard Yanks undoubtedly existed and did bring home recordings from their trips, these tended to be (in the case of Richard Barton) jazz and (for others) mostly country and western LPs and OST [official soundtrack] albums”.<sup>519</sup> Brocken, here, falls into line with the first criticism, that the music the Cunard Yanks brought back was not rock ‘n’ roll at all, but country and jazz. He backs this up with the second criticism: “in Liverpool, then (and despite the myth surrounding US records), certain record shops, record departments (and the ubiquitous radio) were constitutive of transforming listening practices. Different genres of music became more culturally audible by the existence of retail record shops caring about selling music that people had (or had not) heard on the radio. This is not ‘romantic’, in the ‘Cunard Yank’ sense, but is perhaps somewhat more realistic in that ordinary people can be seen participating in an *ad hoc* distribution

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<sup>517</sup> Oral testimony from Ted ‘Kingsize’ Taylor, recorded by the author, 10 January 2017.

<sup>518</sup> Oral testimony from Mal Jefferson, recorded by the author, 12 July 2017.

<sup>519</sup> M. Brocken, *Other Voices: Hidden Histories of Liverpool’s Popular Music Scenes, 1930s-1970s* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p. 29.



system of shops, coffee bars, and venues – even radio and television”.<sup>520</sup> Radio and television, therefore, were supposedly of higher importance than the apocryphal Cunard Yanks. Frankie Connor also downplays the Cunard Yank angle, but is a little more circumspect on it:

I’m sure people brought records in. I think it’s a little bit more than that. They were playing American records in Birmingham, the Birmingham scene. Newcastle. Birmingham was not a seaport by any means...Luxembourg was a big influence – radio under your pillow. The things I would hear as a child about Liverpool because we were a port and Cunard was a big line, ships coming and going at the time. We were a busy port, lots of shipping lanes, the records came in, I’m sure, but I think it gets more credit than it deserves...I remember hearing calypso music in the 50s and that was not a Cunard Yank music.<sup>521</sup>

The Cunard Yank idea for Connor, therefore, is one amongst many. Whilst he acknowledges that records were brought in, as even the most ardent critics of the idea do, he is conscious to downplay its importance. Playing up the radio, for example, is a crucial aspect of the methods in which the Cunard Yank concept is downplayed. Radio was certainly not a medium solely available to Liverpool. Supporting Brocken’s contention, therefore, Connor places Liverpool within an unexceptional framework – comparing the city with other, non-seaport places and prioritising the radio, specifically Radio Luxembourg, for providing some of the early inspiration to his record playing. Connor also references the second main criticism – that the Cunard Yank music was not rock ‘n’ roll at all.

Ramon Deen, a mixed-race musician from Liverpool, was very contemptuous of the Cunard Yank idea. He claimed that, “I’d never heard of it. Yeah, there was a lot of white guys in Liverpool who sailed with the Cunard company. But this thing that came about – the Cunard Yanks – never heard of it. Just thought it was someone blagging and a rumour going ‘round. I don’t remember anything of that nature...I’m sure some of those guys did bring records over from the States and that, but it wouldn’t be records of, in my opinion, Fats Domino and Little Richard. It was the country and western stuff, because that’s what they played. These guys wore cowboy hats and boots and played country and western”.<sup>522</sup> For Deen, record stores were the main avenue of acquiring the records that formed the bedrock of the Merseybeat movement, “Brian Epstein had two

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<sup>520</sup> *Ibid*, p. 29.

<sup>521</sup> Oral testimony from Frankie Connor, recorded by the author, 4 October 2015.

<sup>522</sup> Oral testimony from Ramon Deen, recorded by the author, 14 March 2018.

record shops. NEMS, the one in Whitechapel and one in Shallot Street in the city centre. We got to know the staff really well because we basically lived in there. The staff would...there was another shop called Kramer and Lee. [We'd ask] 'any chance of getting us this particular track?'. They'd order it from the States and get it imported because you couldn't get it here".<sup>523</sup> Deen, therefore, contributes to both criticisms of the Cunard Yank phenomenon – that it was a source of music on which the Merseybeat era was not reliant, and that there were methods of gaining access to American rock 'n' roll records that made more logistical sense – i.e. through shops and, particularly, NEMS.

The combination of American music and Liverpoolian performance is clearly of enormous importance. The idea of hundreds, possibly thousands of Liverpoolians acquiring records directly from the dock seems somewhat unrealistic, as does the suggestion that Cunard Yanks poured thousands of records into the city which, again, tests the limit of such a thesis. However, if the performative aspect of the Cunard Yank mythology is applied, it would stand to reason to explain both those who swear by the story and those who do not. It is perfectly plausible, in a metropolitan area as large as Merseyside, that people would have had different experiences; that one person's lack of experience of getting records from a Cunard Yank does not necessarily cancel out another person's clear memory of getting records in that manner. The aspects of communal listening, whether on a gramophone or in a live performance, allowed for this music to be disseminated. And, as aforementioned, the Cunard Yanks clearly existed and there are enough examples of people attesting to this particular method of acquiring records.

Perhaps one of the key pieces of evidence in this, regard, however, is the lack of discussion in the press of Liverpool being a centre for American music due to its port. Although it may simply be evidence of the lack of the phenomenon being given a name, the specific term 'Cunard Yank' does not appear in any of the newspaper articles from the time. The evidence that does support the contention are limited to occasional sentences in much wider pieces. This shows that the American influence was certainly something that was considered and was positively thought of at the time of writing, but they absolutely did not go as far to portray Liverpool as being particularly exceptional

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<sup>523</sup> *Ibid.*

in this regard. Some of the earlier quotes have to be briefly reproduced here, as they amount to the sum total of anything that could be considered tangentially related to the Cunard Yank theory. Bob Wooller and Stephen Wolff, quoted earlier, both mentioned the port as being a key cause for the prevalence of American music in the city. As a reminder, Wooller: “the city, being a port, has become more Americanised than the inland places, even London. The R&B trend caught on here first” and Wolff: Why does Liverpool lead the rest? Is it because she is an Atlantic port with numbers of merchant seamen bringing the ‘message’ of rock and roll from the States? Partly.” Notable here is the lack of any specific mention of the Cunard Yanks. Second, is Wolff’s use of “partly”. As already documented he, as established, privileged the performative aspect of the city over the actual reception of the records.

The key question throughout this thesis, however, is of Liverpool exceptionalism. If, for the purposes of this section, it is to be defined as the unique access to American records *at the exclusion of other places in Britain*, then it is hard to reach a conclusive decision on the merits of this argument. There is enough evidence, usually in the form of oral testimony both from the time and in interviews conducted for this research, to conclusively say that the Cunard Yanks existed and were a source of records, of some sort, getting into Liverpool. This is nothing new, however. The method that seems most likely to resolve this question is one of chronology. Those such as The Beatles, Kingsize Taylor, and Mal Jefferson were all involved in the earlier Merseybeat movement whereas those such as Frankie Connor and David Boyce were, by their own admission, participants after the national peak in popularity. As American music became more accessible, both in Liverpool and in Britain as a whole, it seems to accord with the way in which these interviewees frame their experiences – by referring to other cities and noting that they too had access to American records. As time went on and American music disseminated throughout the country, it seems logical that the relative influence of this specific transatlantic network would diminish as alternative networks began to emerge, particularly after and around the so-called British invasion of the American Billboard charts. Spencer Leigh’s criticism of the Cunard Yank idea seems to limit the terminology too much. By suggesting that they were not influential because the records covered by Liverpool groups had already been released Leigh writes off, though just about acknowledges, a longer-term influence that could easily fit into the Cunard Yank idea. This, when considering the clear position of country and western music within the

Liverpudlian oeuvre, makes the influence of the Cunard Yanks seem like it existed in much wider terms than originally considered. The argument, therefore, should not be that the Cunard Yanks can only be thought of in terms that draw direct lines of causation between themselves and the beat music that was released by Liverpool artists locally and into the national charts in the early 1960s. Rather, that the Cunard Yanks operated within and contributed to a much wider cultural and social and economic environment in Liverpool that promoted American music, and the performance of American music as a consequence, which created an extremely hospitable environment for Liverpool beat groups to thrive.

The Cunard Yanks paradigm, therefore, is an exceptionally difficult one to adequately explain. On the one hand, those who have painstakingly combed the archives to see whether the songs covered by Liverpool groups had been released before. On the other, the recollections from a number of musicians active at the time who were able to provide fairly clear details on whosoever they got their records from. It is unlikely that a satisfactory answer will be found – two diametric opposites are hard to reconcile. As aforementioned, however, the Cunard Yanks did exist – of that there can be no question. However, a specific causal link between the sailors that went away to the United States and the rock ‘n’ roll music that was the seed of Merseybeat is very difficult to establish. Even many of the recollections collated for this research speak of the Cunard Yanks in general, almost mythical terms, and, having acknowledged their legend, moved on to explain how they actually got their records – usually via shops or over the airwaves from Radio Luxembourg.

Dissemination via performance, however, seems a much more realistic way of explaining how the phenomenon gathered legs. There is no satisfactory explanation for this, however. That the people of Liverpool became enamoured with this music (unquestionably true) and practised extremely hard to perfect it (also, undoubtedly true) is hard to explain in simple, and singular, terms. The Cunard Yanks, therefore, as part of a wider Liverpool-America connection, probably were of importance. However, as far as being the singularly most important factor in considering why the city exploded in the way it did in the 1960s, the answers are strikingly inconclusive.

### Cunard Yanks: Conclusions

Liverpool was clearly understood to be particularly susceptible to American influence. There was undoubtedly a movement within the press to try and define the phenomenon within American terms. Although, therefore, the precise influence of, for example, the Cunard Yank phenomenon is exceptionally hard to prove, that the city was understood in American terms seems difficult to argue against. With that being said, there is very little to suggest that this, in any way, made the city exceptional compared to others.

What does come through repeatedly, however, is the understanding that it was never American influence alone. The port alone (if indeed the port is the reason for the records arriving) was not enough to thrust Liverpool ahead. At almost every turn it was accompanied by an important caveat: that Liverpoolian performance was the way in which this music, wherever it came from, was disseminated. On their own, if the Cunard Yanks had brought a considerable number of records into Liverpool but people did not want to listen to them, or practise them relentlessly with friends, then it is clear that the Merseybeat movement may not have happened.

As with the other attempts at 'explaining' this phenomenon, the American connection can only be pushed so far. It is beyond question that an American connection *was* used at the time to try and explain Merseybeat and true, too, that the reflective interviews, articles, and other ephemera have privileged the United States, *inter alia*, through the port. To answer the simple question, therefore – how important was the United States to the Merseybeat phenomenon? The answer is, as with most of the British rock 'n' roll in the 1960s, obviously incredibly important. It should go without saying that the vast majority of the Merseybeat movement was based off American records – usually literally, when the covers are taken into account. The extent to which local myths hold up with regard to that influence, however, is highly questionable. The relative lack of contemporary accounts on the Cunard Yanks, for example, is striking – for a popular explanation that has almost become accepted as the official account of Liverpool's exceptionalism in this regard, one would have expected it to feature more prominently in the press at the time.

When exposed to historical analysis, therefore, some of the myths associated with the Merseybeat phenomenon start to come apart somewhat. On this clash between history and memory, Nora is persuasive. "Memory is life, always embodied in living

societies, and as such in permanent evolution, subject to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of the distortions to which it is subject, vulnerable in various ways to appropriation and manipulation, and capable of lying dormant for long periods only to be suddenly reawakened...at the heart of history is a criticism destructive of spontaneous memory. Memory is always suspect in the eyes of history, whose true mission is to demolish it, to repress it".<sup>524</sup>

The Cunard Yanks, therefore, fall victim to the examination of local myth-making. Spencer Leigh's comprehensive investigation into the Cunard Yanks left little to work with on the influence on Merseybeat. This is, however, too restrictive in its definition. This is not to say that the Cunard Yanks did not exist or that their influence cannot be measured in some way. They clearly did exist and did bring records back in some shape or form. The manner in which it is possible to say that they affected Merseybeat in particular, with the particular songs that were played, is highly problematic. In terms of American records entering the city and therefore affecting the musical culture in Liverpool in a longer-term manner, the Cunard Yank story is somewhat persuasive. It is this that Belchem describes as a long-term "cultural implant"<sup>525</sup> rather than a direct cause. There is, however, clear evidence to the contrary, both in the forms of contradictory oral history testimonies and the lack of evidence from the newspaper archives of the time, to suggest that the Cunard Yanks belong more in the popular imagination of Merseybeat, than in the reality of it.

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<sup>524</sup> P. Nora, *Realms of Memory*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 3.

<sup>525</sup> Belchem, *Merseypride*, p. 61.

## Conclusion

This research has sought to challenge the ideas that underpin Liverpool's supposed 'exceptionalism', as proposed by John Belchem. In summary, the applicability of Belchem's thesis to Liverpool's exceptionalism in the Merseybeat period of the 1960s is mixed. Overall, the Liverpool of the 1960s seems to sit in an interstitial space between the city described by Belchem of the pre-Second World War era and that which emerged later in the twentieth century, as a result of a variety of different issues. The three chosen means by which the city's exceptionalism was to be examined were, as shown, of mixed applicability to the idea of the city's 'apartness' or 'difference'.

To start, however, with some of Belchem's central claims. It seems incredibly difficult to describe the Liverpool of the 1960s as being "outside the main narrative frameworks of modern British history",<sup>526</sup> when the city was at the forefront of British popular music in the period examined. While the focus on North-South divides might suggest evidence to the contrary, and the importance of rivalries between Liverpool and London the same, this seems to fit more neatly within press-created or -encouraged narratives than something more fundamental. The sheer weight of literary material being written about Liverpool in the 1960s points not to an exclusion from one of the narrative frameworks of twentieth century British history, but rather an indelibly central role within it – that of Merseybeat and the subsequent British invasion and Swinging Sixties movement, though the demise of Merseybeat and subsequent re-establishment of London as the cultural hegemon in Britain should be taken into account. Belchem's above assertion is, therefore, far too strong to be accepted for this period alone.

On the importance of Irishness within Belchem's thesis, there is no doubt that many in Liverpool draw upon their ancestral Irishness, or even their own more personal Irishness, in order to complement or contribute to their identities in various different ways. The manner in which a number of the interviewees reflected on the role of Irishness in contributing to some sort of Liverpudlian identity was totally unsurprising. The personal recollections of Irishness in some of the interviewees' youths was evidence of Irishness still playing an evidential role within the ordinary lives of Liverpudlians at this time. Irishness, however, was starting to fall away. As Keith

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<sup>526</sup> Belchem, *Merseypride*, p. xi.

Roberts examined, the decline of sectarianism in the city is evidence of this. The city, in his view, became less sectarian as class solidarity across religions became more elevated, slums were cleared, Merseybeat provided a shared sense of identity, and Liverpool and Everton football clubs filled the void of Liverpoolian rivalry-making.<sup>527</sup> One must not take this too far, however. The city of the 1960s was still, as David Boyce suggested, one where Labour activists would not canvas on a street with a doll of William of Orange in one of the house windows. The question, therefore, is how far along this road towards Liverpool's apparent de-Irishification the period under study is. There was consensus that Irishness played little role in the Merseybeat music itself. As explained in Chapter Two, once the interviewees were asked to move beyond the platitudinous, few links could be drawn. This does not, however, preclude some of the broader aspects of Liverpool's social and cultural Irishness from still being relevant, but the almost total absence of Irish frameworks from the music press suggests that this period was one where Irishness was beginning to become less of an overt piece of the Scouse jigsaw.

The broader question of where Irishness still affects the modern and/or contemporary Scouse identity is not for this research, but one point should be considered. As aforementioned, Belchem describes the "lowly Irish slummy" as the foundational character in the "true Scottie Road scouser"<sup>528</sup> whilst also claiming that "as an accent (and much more), scouse is a recently invented tradition, a cultural response to the city's decline".<sup>529</sup> As the city under examination for this research was not yet in the decline of the 1970s and 1980s, it seems likely that this was perhaps the beginning of the end for identifiably 'Irish' aspects of Liverpoolian life which were still prominent in everyday activities. Though Orange Order parades still take place in the city to this day, they are the type of event that, to adapt Marion Leonard's phrase, are actively claimed, rather than part of the mundanity of everyday life. The extent of Irish influence on the contemporary Scouse identity, in contrast to late-C20th decline, is one gap in historiography which is yet to be effectively examined.

Other aspects of Liverpool's 'exceptionalism' sit on much more solid ground. The city's supposed connection to America, for example, is one of these. Though the effect of

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<sup>527</sup> Roberts, pp. 408-413.

<sup>528</sup> Belchem, *Merseypride*, p. xxxiii.

<sup>529</sup> *Ibid*, p. 33.



the port on this is hotly disputed, as shown, the presence of America within the broader Liverpoolian psyche is hard to doubt – certainly in this period. The number of interviewees that privileged American influences, the repeated references to America in the press, and the presence of American records within the city (whether from the Cunard Yanks, Burtonwood, or elsewhere) all combine to provide a convincing case for this aspect of Liverpool’s ‘exceptionalism’. Irrespective of the divides over where these records came from, both Liverpoolians and those from elsewhere in the country privileged the ‘American connection’, real or imagined, as being a key part of the Liverpoolian id. Though this, too, should come with caution. Like Irishness, this may have been the beginning of the end for the privileging of American connections. Liverpool soon began to turn towards Europe, ironically enough considering the city’s geographical ill-placement for trade with European partners.<sup>530</sup> The European Union’s ‘Objective One’ funding, the success of one of its football clubs in UEFA competitions, and the culmination of all of this with a resounding vote to Remain in the 2016 referendum suggest a city that does not privilege the ‘American connection’ anymore.

Insofar as Liverpool being “un-English”<sup>531</sup> is concerned, this carried relatively little weight in the city under examination in this research. The ‘we’re not English we are Scouse’ mentality seems to very much be a creation of the more modern city. Multiple interviewees recoiled from that suggestion when put to them, as explained. What was evident, however, was a clear hostility towards London that perhaps formed the foundation for the later ‘un-English’ mentality to emerge, but in this research its impact was uneven and inconsistent. As shown, much of this hostility broke down on class lines. While there is certainly a link between the marginalisation felt by some of the interviewees for this research and the later city, this is not, however, in itself enough to suggest that Liverpoolians considered themselves, for the most part, not English.

Liverpool’s social and economic status, however, certainly was a more persuasive factor in this regard. Where certain music newspapers and other media struggled to grasp the idea of American influence on the city, the idea that it was a site of poverty was an easier one to convey. Farson’s aforementioned contention of Liverpool being so deprived that “making their own entertainment”<sup>532</sup> was necessary,

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<sup>530</sup> Belchem, *Merseypride*, p. 30.

<sup>531</sup> *Ibid*, p. xxvii.

<sup>532</sup> *Beat City*, 1963, BBC Television.

matches up with the oral evidence of most interviewees. Brian Jones, for example, suggested that “it was a grey place to live in. People needed something to lift them out of the doom and gloom, you know. Music was a great way to escape”.<sup>533</sup> This offers a departure from Belchem, however, in how this poverty is represented. Where, for Belchem, the ‘slummy’ character was Irish almost by necessity, in the city of the 1960s it was less of a requirement. As the outward Irishness of Liverpudlians began to be subsumed into a broader ‘Scouse’ identity, class came to unify the city, transcending both religious divides and, possibly synonymously, ones based on Irishness. The city of the 1970s and beyond certainly has class at the centre of its identity – the sense of marginalisation was crucial in fostering a sense of apartness from Thatcherite England though, as time went on, ‘Irishness’ became more of a long-term, ancestral influence than one that had directly led to, for example, sectarian violence as in the early twentieth century. Neither did the interviewees reference their Irish heritage or suchlike when explaining their comparative poverty, nor did the media privilege similar impulses when describing Liverpool as a deprived city. Though ‘Irishness’ was to come back in fits and starts, such as with Margolis’ oft-referred to piece, it was never as closely linked to Liverpool’s character as it was before the slum clearances of the post-war era.

By Belchem’s own admission, the city’s reputation for cosmopolitanism has largely been lost. Certainly, the Liverpool of the last thirty-to-forty years has suffered, possibly disproportionately, from racist incidents and racism on a larger scale. The divisions explained in this research, and elsewhere, do not paint a cosmopolitan city. Rather, they portray a city that was riven with racial divides, sometimes physically manifested. While the music industry in the city actually seems to set itself aside from this, the manner in which racial divides were noticed by all interviewees portrays a city where the release of a report detailing the “uniquely horrific”<sup>534</sup> nature of Liverpool’s racism two decades later should not be a surprise. This must be tempered, however, with the effect on the music itself. Clearly positively influenced by black musical styles, the Merseybeat movement was itself a partial product of cosmopolitanism. The concurrent racial divides that ran through Liverpool, however, are another facet of a city that is built on this kind of dichotomy.

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<sup>533</sup> Oral testimony from Brian Jones, recorded by the author, 6 September 2017.

<sup>534</sup> Gifford, *Loosen the Shackles*, p. 23.

The most convincing aspect of Liverpool's exceptionalism in this regard is the role that the port played in creating a sense of apartness or difference. Where the port was a conduit through which immigrant Irish arrived in the mid-nineteenth century, however, instead the port's role as a place for the importation of non-celtic influences increased. While the Cunard Yanks are a contentious part of Merseybeat history, the acceptance of the port as a method through which records arrived is not. Almost every interviewee knew someone who went to sea or indeed went to sea themselves. The descriptions of the port as a place where Liverpool's supposedly innate character was understood contribute to a sense of it being crucial to most aspects of the city's exceptionalism, certainly in the time period researched. The port affected almost everything in Liverpool and whilst it may have decreased in its significance to the identities of Liverpudlians after its substantial decline, in the 1960s it still occupied a space in these identities that was considerable and a part of everyday life in the city. Unlike, for example, the impact of Irishness on Merseybeat, the port was much more easily quantifiable – records had to arrive through it, the Cunard Yanks had to get records from the United States via it, and Kingsize Taylor would probably not have been given a Superman comic from a bellboy on a Cunard boat without it. The port was more than this, however. If it had become less significant than in its heyday, its devastating decline was yet to happen. Rather than existing in the memories of Liverpudlians as an artefact, its active operation in the city at the time added to Liverpudlian senses of self considerably.

The above combine to create a picture of Liverpool Exceptionalism which is muddled and sometimes contradictory. In parts, Belchem's thesis applies but it must always be tempered with the fact that its application is never done so wholesale. The city's transition from one where its Irishness was clear, evidenced, and obvious to one where it has always had to be qualified as being a part of 'Scouseness' that is hard to explain and quantify was well underway in this period. Irishness, as a key pillar of Belchem's thesis pre-war, is considerably into the process of changing here. The port, too, though still a prominent feature of the Liverpudlian identity in the 1960s, sits similarly on the precipice of reduction to heritage. Liverpool of the post-1960s would undergo a rapid decline. Though outside the scope of this research, evidence of this resulting in an increase in a sense of exceptionalism or difference is identifiable, though as yet understudied within this context. The convergence of a number of different

factors, almost totally unrelated to the Irish and less related to the port, created a heightened sense of apartness but this has proven to be particularly difficult to examine or analyse.

Finally, the difficulty of applying academic rigour to popular concepts such as Liverpool Exceptionalism is considerable. It is extremely difficult to compartmentalise, or rather to encourage interviewees to compartmentalise, the experiences of the year up until the interview takes place, when discussing a place in their lives several decades previously. Knowledge of the current city is almost impossible to account for when putting together a piece of research that draws heavily from memories that will have inevitably been shaped by the intervening years. Challenging, too, is the effect that people's different experiences have on them. When considering an idea as vast as the exceptionalism of a diverse group of people, however, it is tempting to return to Mark Christian, "identities may well be imagined, but they are still real in the manner that they are manifested in the modern world".<sup>535</sup>

Therefore, perhaps any conclusion that attempts to precisely define Liverpool Exceptionalism has to acknowledge the limitations in any such definition. It will always be extremely difficult to provide a definition that manages to satisfy a broad enough proportion of the group under examination for it to be comprehensive. The best that can be achieved is a recognition of these limitations and the acceptance that such attempts may never be definitive. With this in mind, however, the existence of common frameworks, manners of thinking, and identities do all contribute to some form of Liverpoolian exceptionalism. Though it shifts over time and its meaning is often difficult to quantify, it is striking to see how many separate people believe similar concepts about their city. Though popular myth making should be treated with the utmost caution, and the promotion of apocryphal stories rather than historical facts should be treated similarly, the manner in which these aspects of Liverpoolian identity have achieved a permanence within it is striking.

In closing, Liverpool of the 1960s was at a tipping point. Liverpool as it existed between 1960 and 1965 was close enough to the port-dominated city of the early twentieth century to conclude that Belchem's thesis, in the main, applies. It was, however, also at the beginning of a change in the city that would transmogrify it into

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<sup>535</sup> Christian, pp. 2-4.

one where *Sunday Telegraph* writers could question whether it wished to continue its membership of the United Kingdom and *Sunday Times* writers could openly label it the 'Self Pity City'. Liverpool's exceptionalism in the 1960s sat astride two distinct eras, with enough to question how much it belonged in either. Liverpool's 'exceptionalism' in this period, therefore, should be considered as a middle point – on the way towards the class-dominated identity forged in the years of decline in the city, but not yet far enough from the port-centric, substantially Irish enclave as described by John Belchem, to be considered divorced from it.

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