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From Elvis to Attica. John Lennon's Atlantic Crossings, 1956-1971

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5/ From Elvis to Attica. John Lennon's Atlantic Crossings, 1956-1971*

Ferdinando FASCE

ABSTRACT: *The article deals with a decade and a half of virtual and real Atlantic crossings through which John Lennon, in the mid-1950s a British adolescent fan of American rock'n'roll, in the early 1970s turned into a global rock star, and eventually became an activist songwriter, denouncing racial and cultural inequities of American society. Such crossings open a window on the dialectics between the personal and the political, the artistic and the corporate underpinning popular music in the «long Sixties.» In the process, the article casts light on the routes and infrastructures through which cultural items, ideas, and people moved across the Atlantic, enriching and complicating traditional notions of Americanization and hybridization between the two sides of the ocean.*

ABSTRACT: *Il saggio esamina il quindicennio di traversate atlantiche, virtuali e reali, mediante le quali John Lennon, a metà anni cinquanta del Novecento un adolescente inglese fan del rock'n'roll statunitense, all'inizio degli anni settanta si trasforma in una rock star globale e in un cantautore militante, che denuncia le disuguaglianze razziali e culturali della società americana. Tali traversate aprono una finestra sulla dialettica fra il personale e il politico, l'artistico e il commerciale sottesa alla popular music nei «lunghi anni sessanta». L'articolo illumina i percorsi e le infrastrutture attraverso le quali prodotti culturali, idee e persone attraversarono l'Atlantico, arricchendo e articolando le tradizionali nozioni di americanizzazione e ibridazione fra le due sponde dell'oceano.*

Introduction

Liverpool, Menlove Avenue, April 1956. Like tens of thousands of other teenagers across Europe, fifteen year old John Winston Lennon strives to catch the Radio Luxembourg signal coming over his radio set. Suddenly *Heartbreak Hotel* drops into his world, in the words of one historian, «like an atom-bomb with no four-minute warning». From that moment on, as his exasperated aunt and parental guardian Mimi Stanley recalled, «It was nothing but Elvis Presley, Elvis Presley, Elvis Presley»¹. Fast forward fifteen years. Ann Arbor, Michigan, December 1971. As

* This article is based on a lecture delivered to the 67th Aisna Annual Seminar «Circulating America(s). History, Aesthetics, Politics, Centro Studi Americani, Rome, May 4, 2021. I want to thank Andrea Carosso, Gigliola Nocera, and Sabrina Vellucci for their encouraging response; Tim Riley, Barry Shank, Brian Ward,

an FBI agent duly reports, rock celebrity John Lennon, who has just moved to the States with his wife and artistic partner Yoko Ono, shares the stage with the most prominent members of the «Chicago Seven», the leaders of the antiwar protests outside the Democratic national convention in 1968². The rally is the culmination of a long political campaign calling for the release from prison of John Sinclair, a Michigan countercultural activist who has already served two years of a ten-year sentence for selling two joints of marijuana to an undercover agent. The fifteen minutes set performed by Lennon on this occasion comprises *Attica State*, a song he has just written to expose the brutal repression of the Attica Correctional Facility's uprising a few months before³.

The two episodes frame a decade and a half of real and metaphorical Atlantic crossings through which a British adolescent consumer of American popular music turned into a global rock star, hitting the big time in the US music scene. Eventually he became an activist songwriter denouncing the racial and cultural inequities of American society⁴. Such crossings are seen in this article through a double lens. One is that of the history of music as a social practice of production, consumption, and construction of individual and collective identities in a hybrid social space. Such space contains the market and the public sphere, in an age of impending globalisation and growing social turmoil⁵.

The other lens consists in applying to the founder of the Beatles the transnational and global perspectives that have only recently emerged in the scholarly writing on the band. Still missing from the burgeoning literature, most of a journalistic nature, on Lennon, such perspectives seem particularly fitting as he was the only Beatle who decided to live abroad on a regular basis, while also crossing the racial and cultural East-West divide by engaging with Yoko Ono⁶.

Kenneth Womack, and Jon Wiener for their inspiring work and their suggestions; Kitty Oliver for sharing with me her so vivid recollections; John Paul Russo for his insightful reading and editing of a previous version of the article; and two anonymous reviewers for «Diacronie» whose comments greatly contributed strengthening this piece.

¹ LEWISOHN, Mark, *All These Years*, vol. I, *Tune In*, London, Little, Brown, 2013, p. 85; COLEMAN, Ray, *Lennon. The Definitive Biography, Updated and with a new Introduction*, New York, Harper Perennial, 1992, p. 134; NORMAN, Philip, *John Lennon. The Life*, New York, HarperCollins, 2008, p. 82.

² The report is reproduced in WIENER, Jon, *Gimme Some Truth: The John Lennon FBI Files*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999, p. 122.

³ WIENER, Jon, *Come together. John Lennon in His Time*, London, Faber and Faber, 1995, pp. 186-193.

⁴ A comprehensive examination of Lennon's changing relations to U.S. music and culture over time lies beyond the confines of this article. For the Beatles period and his exchanges, among others, with Dylan and the Beach Boys, see GOULD, Jonathan, *Can't Buy Me Love. The Beatles, Britain, and America*, Three Rivers Press, New York, 2007 and FASCE, Ferdinando, *La musica nel tempo. Una storia dei Beatles*, Torino, Einaudi, 2018.

⁵ SMALL, Christopher, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*, Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 1998; SUISMAN, David, «Afterword: Music, Sound, History», in *Journal of Social History*, 52, 2/2018, pp. 383-389; FABBRI, Franco, *Il tempo di una canzone. Saggi sulla popular music*, Milano, Jaca Book, 2021.

⁶ LEOVIC, Sam, «Here, There, and Everywhere: The Beatles, America, and Globalization, 1964-1968», in *Journal of American Studies*, 51, 1/2017, pp. 43-65; STEVENS, Carolyn S., *The Beatles in Japan*, London and New York, Routledge, 2018. For recent overviews of the literature on Lennon, see SOUTHERLAND KESSLER, Jude, *The John Lennon Series and «Factional» Narrative Biography*, in WOMACK, Kenneth and KAPURCH, Katie (editors), *New Critical Perspectives on the Beatles. Things We Said Today*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 263-278; FASCE, Ferdinando, «Roll on John. Lennon quarant'anni dopo», in *Bibliomanie*, 50, 2020, URL:

His Atlantic crossings open a window on the dialectics between the personal and the political, the artistic and the corporate, the countercultural and the mainstream underpinning the transnational circulation of music in the «long Sixties»⁷. In the process the article casts light on the routes and infrastructures through which cultural items, ideas, and people moved across the Atlantic, enriching and complicating traditional notions of Americanization and hybridization between the two sides of the ocean.

The story proceeds in four episodes, one of them located in the Old World, the rest on the other side of the «pond»; three entail Lennon's physical presence, one as a consumer, the other two as composer and interpreter, while in the fourth it is his music, performed in his absence, that takes center stage.

1. An Imaginary American⁸

By joining the young Lennon blown away by the sudden irruption of Elvis' music into his life one finds himself catapulted into the tangled web of interests, emotional investments, and cultural exchanges encompassing Britain and the United States in the postwar period. This web is the object of an ongoing scholarly investigation under the somehow overlapping categories of «Americanization» and «special relationship»⁹. As John F. Lyons summarizes, though «hardly all-pervasive [...] the American stamp on British society» in the 1950s «was unmistakable.» This stamp, however, came with a generational split. In grey, austerity-stricken Britain, younger people were attracted to the United States more than their parents. The images of abundance and the rebellious aura emanating from Hollywood and American mass culture mesmerized them. Riding motorbikes and cars, the likes of Marlon Brando or James Dean in leather jackets personified a generational defiance towards authority that one could hardly detect in British films in this pre-new cinema era¹⁰. Against this backdrop, rock 'n' roll worked as a catalyst, a clarion call (in Lennon's words, «when I heard it, it was the end for me»)¹¹ in the name of

< <https://www.bibliomanie.it/?p=5112> > [accessed 18 August 2022]; ALBERTAZZI, Silvia, *John Lennon...e ora sto dicendo «Pace»*, Arenzano, Gruppo Editoriale Castel Negrino, 2022.

⁷ MARWICK, Arthur, «The Cultural Revolution of the Long Sixties: Voices of Reaction, Protest, and Permeation», in *International History Review* 27, 4/2005, pp. 780-806.

⁸ For the definition of the Beatles as «imaginary Americans», see FIEDLER, Leslie, *Waiting for the End*, New York, Stein and Day, 1964, p. 67.

⁹ WEBB, Clive, COOK, Robert, «British attitudes towards the United States since 1941», in *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 18, 3/2020, pp. 277-282 provide an overview on the the broad issue of the American influence on the post-WWII British popular culture, pointing out how an adequate comprehensive treatment is still missing.

¹⁰ LYONS, John F., *America in the British Imagination. 1945 to the Present*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 8, 18-29, 50-58.

¹¹ NORMAN, Philip, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

generational independence from parents and other adults who more often than not condemned those blaring sounds as vulgar and immoral.

Yet, a host of social and cultural barriers made access to this newly emerging fad far from easy for their British young enthusiasts. English recording companies had a long history of partnerships with their US counterparts through which for most of the century American popular music had dominated the British scene. But now they hesitated extending transnational license agreements with their US counterparts to the new genre, for fear that it might soon fizzle out in a phase of rapid and uncertain transition to a mass record market increasingly addressed to young people. No better opportunities were provided by the other main arm of the music industry, live concerts, due to the tug of war between promoters and the Musicians' Union. Failing to establish permanent agreements with its American counterpart, the British music union fought hard to reduce to a minimum the influx of performers across the Atlantic. Nor was it eager to make an exception for a genre that the bulk of its members, highly skilled musicians with a classical background, despised as a threat and an insult to their craft¹².

Cultural condescension and economic considerations were also responsible for the almost total absence of rock music from the radio BBC programs, shaped by the conservative taste of the UK's major broadcaster and by union agreements limiting the amount of recorded music that could be broadcast. Such agreements accommodated the union's overarching concern that the use of recorded music would not replace the employment of live musicians and the record companies' fear that over-use of recorded music on the radio would hurt record sales¹³. Hence, the popularity among the younger audience of Radio Luxembourg, the one cross-border broadcaster to the UK, whose air-time was entirely block-booked by the US major labels with their own programmes in English, alongside shows featuring American dj star Alan Freed. The Luxembourg signal could only reach the UK after dark and even then it faded in and out. But, far from deterring the young audience, the problems with reception only added to the clandestine magic of the station, and emboldened its listeners in their pursuit¹⁴.

¹² CLOONAN, Martin, BRENNAN, Matt, «Alien invasion: the British Musicians' Union and foreign musicians», in *Popular Music*, 32, 2/2013, pp. 277-295, 288-291; WILIAMSON, John, CLOONAN, Martin, *Players' Work Time. A History of the British Musicians Union, 1893-2013*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2016, pp. 145-159.

¹³ CLOONAN, Martin, «Negotiating needletime: the Musicians' Union, the BBC and the record companies, c. 1920-1990», in *Social History*, 41, 4/2016, pp. 353-374, pp. 359-361; WITTS, Richard, «Needle Time: the BBC, the Musicians' Union, popular music, and the reform of radio in the 1960s», in *Popular Music History*, 7, 3/2012, pp. 241-262, pp. 241-242.

¹⁴ GOURVISH, Terry, TENNENT, Kevin, «Peterson and Berger Revisited. Changing market dominance in the British popular music industry, c. 1950-1980», in *Business History*, 52, 2/2010, pp. 187-206, p. 193; COLEMAN, Ray, *op. cit.*, p. 134; BROCKEN, Michael, *Other Voices: Hidden Histories of Liverpool's Music Scenes, 1930s-1970s*, Farnham and Burlington, Ashgate, 2010, pp. 111-114, 218-219. Having begun to broadcast to Britain since the very start, in 1933, Radio Luxembourg became increasingly popular among young people, but, due to technical problems, her actual ability to compete with the BBC in the 1950s was still quite limited. See CLOONAN, Martin, «The production of English rock and roll stardom in the 1950s», in *Popular Music History*,

In spite of its gloomy atmosphere, of all places postwar Liverpool was a relatively privileged one for a rock fan living outside of the US. Long standing deep economic connections to the States and the attendant familiarity with their popular culture had turned the city into a major center for American country and western music. In the 1950s, thanks to the informal black record market nourished by Liverpoolian merchant navy seamen crossing the Atlantic and by the nearby huge Burtonwood American Air Base, this enthusiasm for country and western paved the way for the development of a local interest in rockabilly, that is, Elvis¹⁵. Still, familial habits and social class could severely limit access to the new music. In the case of Lennon, his aunt Mimi, a classical music buff, did permit her nephew only a sparse use of the radio to listen to what she considered just «noise.» Nor did she allow a record player enter the house. So John had to take the few records his lower-middle class condition afforded him to his mother Julia. She lived close by with her new family, owned a record player and, unlike her ten year older sister Mimi, was much into current rhythms, Presley included, and more than willing to let her child use her machine. Alternative opportunities were offered by collective listening at friends' and schoolmates' places and, once again limited by the little money John could dispose of, by jukeboxes in coffee bars, or the occasional airing of an American rock movie sensation in one of the local movie-theaters¹⁶.

For all its peculiarities, young Lennon's access to the new music in several ways mirrored that of the average English boy his age. The largely imaginary rock world they inhabited was quite frugal, highly volatile in its forms and times of fruition, based on rudimentary, makeshift listening equipment, easily exposed to the whims of the airwaves and of the conservative adult tutors who presided over their lives. Which had two significant implications for their future and the future of music in England. For one thing, due to the difficulties Lennon had to face in order to pursue it, that music enjoyed an outsider status that resonated with natural-born little rebels like him. For another, such obstacles heightened the do-it-yourself nature inherent in this music, with its elementary technique, and forced its practitioners to become perennial self-taught experimenters, ever ready to absorb and recreate whatever materials at their disposal¹⁷. No

4, 3/2009, pp. 271-288, p. 277 and on the history of Radio Luxembourg, LEGAY, Richard Julien, «Commercial radio stations and their dispositif. Transnational and intermedial perspectives on Radio Luxembourg and Europe n°1 in the long sixties», Ph. D. dissertation, Université de Luxembourg, 2020.

¹⁵ MILLARD, André, *Beatlemania. Technology, Business, And Teen Culture In Cold War America*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012, pp. 70-76; IMMERWARH, Daniel, *How to Hide an Empire. A History of the Greater United States*, New York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2019, pp. 357-359; MCMANUS, Kevin, *Nashville of the North: Country Music in Liverpool*, Liverpool, Institute of Popular Music, 1994, pp. 1-5.

¹⁶ KENNY, Francis, *The Making of John Lennon. The Untold Story of the Rise and Fall of the Beatles*, Edinburgh, Luath Press, 2014, pp. 66-67; NORMAN, Philip, *op. cit.*, p. 92; COLEMAN, Ray, *op. cit.*, p. 137; LEWISOHN, Mark, *op. cit.*, pp. 96, 116.

¹⁷ LYONS, John. F, *op. cit.*, p. 56; FRITH, Simon, BRENNAN, Matt, CLOONAN, Martin et al., *The History of Live Music in Britain, Volume I: 1950-1967: From Dance Hall to the 100 Club*, New York, Routledge, 2009, pp. 89-91.

wonder then that mimicry, bricolage, and creative rielaboration would become a signature of the Beatles' brand and a key asset of their success.

2. Crossing the color line

By speaking of the Beatles' success, we have already moved to the following chapter of our story. The chapter deals with the moment when Lennon would realize his dream («John was forever dreaming of America. It was as if his 'spiritual home' was across the Atlantic,» a friend would recall¹⁸) and cross the ocean at the helm of a band of «imaginary Americans» like himself who succeeded in firing the imagination of American youth. Andrea Carosso has brilliantly explored the cultural triangulation, from Memphis and Chicago to such poverty-ridden global peripheries of postwar Britain as Liverpool and back to the riches of the Billboard charts, which empowered mainstream American popular music with the sounds of African American traditions. This process was not without contradictions, as on the short run the Beatles' impact unintentionally caused the further eclipse and crisis of the already fledging black music independent labels and their artists. Yet, there is another, long neglected side to the relations between the band and the African American world that is worthy of attention, the intersection between the «British invasion» and the escalation of the racial question that inflamed America in the summer of 1964 just weeks before the band started its first triumphal US summer tour. In the tense atmosphere of growing Southern Massive resistance to racial reform that preceded and accompanied the passage of the Civil Rights Act, American cities, north and south, exploded. Segregationist violence culminated in the murder of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner, three young activists of the black voters' registration campaign Freedom Summer, by the KKK in Meridian, Mississippi. In the North the shooting of a black teenager by an off-duty police detective in Harlem, the symbol of black America, set off the first full-scale urban riot of the decade¹⁹.

Until recently scholars failed to establish a connection between those dramatic events and the seemingly escapist sound of an act that was mostly a white teenager phenomenon. It took one distinguished British historian, Brian Ward, to rescue from oblivion the hidden, but significant,

¹⁸ BROCKEN, Michael, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

¹⁹ CAROSSO, Andrea, *Recolonizing the Blues: The paradox of the British Invasion of American Popular Music*, in M'BAYE, Babacar, HALL, Alexander Charles Oliver (editors), *Crossing Traditions: American Popular Music in Local and Global Contexts*, Lanham, Toronto, and Plymouth, The Scarecrow Press, 2013, pp. 122-146, pp. 132-133; MANHART, Allyson, *The Rise of the Beatles and the Fall of Vee-Jay Records*, in PREGNALL, Andrew, ARQUETTE, Jason, MANHART, Allyson et al. (editors), *Welcome to the Beatles*, Blackburg, VT Publishing, 2018, pp. 58-71; LYTLE, Mark Hamilton, *The Sixties Era from Elvis to the Fall of Richard Nixon*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 147-163; FLAMM, Michael W., *In the Heat of the Summer. The New York Riots of 1964 and the War on Crime*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania University Press, 2017, pp. 122-144.

thread linking the fab four and the quest for racial justice. Jacksonville, Florida, the night of September 11, 1964 is the setting of our second episode. Conventional accounts single out this concert for a missed opportunity. Due to Hurricane Dora ravaging the area until a couple of days before the concert, one fourth of the 32.000 fans who had secured a ticket within the gigantic Gator Bowl stadium did not show up. This effectively prevented the Beatles from capping a hectic tour, which represented a watershed for music live performance, with an un-heard of average attendance of 14.000 people, by beating the attendance record for a popular music show (26.500) set by Presley almost a decade before. Now, thanks to new, more thorough historical investigation, their appearance in Jacksonville is recalled for another reason, as even the final report of the local task force on civil rights history duly acknowledges²⁰.

It all started with an announcement the band made five days before the concert. On hearing rumours that the Gator Bowl stadium might be segregated, the Beatles issued a press release announcing they would not play in such circumstances. «We will not appear unless Negroes are allowed to sit anywhere,» they declared. As befitted his role of leader, Lennon was especially unwavering: «We never play to segregated audiences and we aren't going to start now. I'd sooner lose our appearance money.» Always ready to stand at his side, in a typical one for all Beatlesian fashion, Paul added, «We don't like it if there's any segregation or anything, because we're not used to it. It just seems mad to us [...] y'know, I don't think coloured people are any different. They're just the same as anyone else [...] You can't treat other human beings as animals»²¹.

Any conclusive evidence of why and how the Beatles took this stance, which was the first explicit political act on their part, is missing. Following an unwritten, but most strict, rule for the world of popular music, up to that point, under the unyielding control of manager Brian Epstein, they had refrained from any controversial statement or act. Before the tour Epstein had briefed them on the need to stay away from any current dispute, especially concerning Vietnam. How can we explain that stand that did not fail to worry him? John had shown a strong interest into the race issue a few months before, during their actual first visit to the US, that revolved mostly around a series of tv shows. On that occasion, according to photographer Harry Benson who accompanied the band, Lennon's first question as the plane landed in Miami, where the Beatles were to participate in the Ed Sullivan Show, was «where are the *freedom riders?*» suggesting at

²⁰ GOULD, Jonathan, *Can't Buy Me Love. The Beatles, Britain, and America*, New York, Three Rivers Press, 2007, p. 250; WARD, Brian, «The C is for Christ: Arthur Unger, Datebook Magazine and the Beatles», in *Popular Music and Society*, 35, 4/2012, pp. 541-560, pp. 548-549; WARD, Brian, «Where Are the Freedom Riders? The Beatles and the US South, 1964», unpublished paper, April-May 2014, pp. 6-7 (in author's possession); KANE, Larry, *Lennon Revealed*, Philadelphia, Running Press Book Publishers, 2005, pp. 115-116, 143; City of Jacksonville Florida, TASK FORCE ON CIVIL RIGHTS HISTORY FINAL REPORT, June 2018, URL: < <https://s3.amazonaws.com/visitjax-2018/craft-embeds/Civil-Rights-Timeline-Jacksonville.pdf> > [accessed 22 April 2021].

²¹ WARD, Brian, «Where Are the Freedom Riders? The Beatles and the US South, 1964», cit., p. 12.

least some familiarity with the civil rights movement. Since the British press, including the music one, reported extensively and favourably on the freedom struggles, it seems feasible that John, a notoriously avid devourer of newspapers and magazines extremely attentive to civic and political matters, in spite of his official self-presentation as a nonpolitical person, had developed some curiosity for the question. The summer tour only heightened it. According to another eyewitness, Art Schreiber, an American journalist who followed the Beatles during the tour, Lennon never stopped asking about social and political issues. Having heard that an American journalist on the tour had participated in the memorable *Selma* to Montgomery *march* alongside Martin Luther King, he bombarded him with questions on racial discrimination and the fight against it²².

Some scholars have suggested that this interest might reflect a profound sense of respect and gratitude that the Beatles felt toward black people and their music, a feeling they never missed a chance to express whenever given the opportunity to talk about their sources of inspiration. From the very start of his career Lennon never hid the fact that, for all his sacred devotion for Elvis, it soon dawned on him that there might be someone even better than the King, and that was none other than the flamboyant black artist Little Richard. Other scholars have mentioned the Beatles' exposure in their prime to the musically and socially ebullient Afro Caribbean community in Liverpool, an experience that helped them develop a sense of interracial free exchange and solidarity uncommon in 1950s Britain. Cultural studies scholar Jon Stratton conjectures that the Irish, diasporic origins of the fab four may have contributed to their racial progressive stance²³. Be that as it may, when reaching Jacksonville the band stuck to its decision and refused to play without assurances that the stadium would be integrated. At first, the promoters balked at the notion of adhering to the group's demands and giving up their standard practices that, in spite of the recently approved Civil Rights Act and in accordance with the pervasive Massive Resistance Southern code, provided for segregated seatings, restrooms, and water fountains within the premises. But ultimately, pressed by the band's stern determination, they had to relent²⁴.

To be sure, it was largely a symbolic victory, given the relative dearth of black Beatles fans, nationwide and in Jacksonville. Owing to the deep-seated and actually growing segregated structure of the US music industry, the Beatles were mostly a white teenager phenomenon. In the words of one black historian reflecting on their early US breakthrough of a few months earlier at the Ed Sullivan show, «My mom was 12 in 1964, a prime age to have caught the Beatlemania bug,

²² *Ibidem*; SPITZ, Bob, *The Beatles: The Biography*, New York, Little, Brown and Company, 2005, p. 329.

²³ HAMILTON, JACK, *Just Around Midnight. Rock and Roll and Racial Imagination*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2016, pp. 121-168; LEWISOHN, Mark, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-87; McGRATH, James, «Where you once belonged»: Class, race and the Liverpool roots of Lennon and McCartney's songs», in *Popular Music History*, 10, 1/2015, pp. 11-31; STRATTON, John, «Ob-la-di Ob-la-da: Paul McCartney, Disapora, and the Politics of Identity», in *Journal for Cultural Research*, 18, 1/2014, pp. 1-24.

²⁴ City of Jacksonville Florida, TASK FORCE ON CIVIL RIGHTS HISTORY FINAL REPORT, June 2018, cit.

but I never heard her talking about them as her favorite artists [...] I asked her why she wasn't a Beatles fan, and she said part of the reason was that her family didn't have a television»²⁵.

Still, in Jacksonville there were at least a few black teenagers from a lower class background who had watched the Beatles at the Ed Sullivan show and, as soon as they heard on the radio about their coming to the local stadium, rushed to buy a ticket. Such was the case with Kitty Oliver, a fifteen year old African American girl. The only child of a single mother who struggled to raise her, Kitty attended the concert after garnering enough money to buy a seat through a weekend job. Feeling «a bit odd», she recently recounted, in her segregated black community largely focused on Motown black groups, she had fallen in love with the Beatles while venturing to listen to a white radio station, instead of just R&B. And when she saw them on tv, she was «swooped up» like the other Beatlemaniacs because they were «exotic,» «flaunting their difference in the way they looked and sounded» and supposedly more «open» on race than other whites «because they were not American.» Out of this fascination, reinforced by seeing *A Hard Day's Night* at the segregated black movie theater of her neighborhood no fewer than seven times, came her decision to buy a ticket for the show. She did not know anything about the group's press conference announcement refusing to perform for a segregated audience. Hence one can imagine her surprise when she found out that her seat was next to a 20ish white guy and that for the first time in her life she was surrounded by a crowd of white faces. Even more surprising was the fact that she did not have to make herself small and sit silent, as she had learned growing up in segregation. Instead, like everybody else, when the Beatles hit the stage for their first song, she stood up and started singing along, her «voice as big and loud as everyone else there, as I knew all the same words.» Unsuprisingly half a century later she still remembered vividly that experience as a defining moment in her life, and one that gave her «a sense of freedom»²⁶.

While adding a new dimension to Kitty's relations and emotional experiences, conversely the Jacksonville episode helped consolidate in the Southern mind, particularly among adult white men, the outright reactionary condemnation of the band, betraying certain deep-seated regional racist anxieties which had emerged in the local newspapers at the time of the Ed Sullivan show. They were described as a «symbol of the sickness of our times», a «group of human freaks who act

²⁵ CHANEY, Alexis, «Swooning, screaming, crying: how teenage girls have driven 60 years of pop music», in *Vox*, January 28, 2016, URL < <https://www.vox.com/2016/1/28/10815492/teenage-girls-screaming> > [accessed 20 October 2016].

²⁶ AGANA-BURKE, Niyonu, «Dr. Kitty Oliver-The Beatles Gave Me My First taste of Freedom», in *Pride*, 25 November 2016, URL < <https://www.pridemagazine.com/dr-kitty-oliver-the-beatles-gave-me-my-first-taste-of-freedom> > [accessed 16 April 2021]; «Dr. Kitty Oliver: The Beatles, Race, and Segregation», in *The Beatles Story*, 1 February 2018, URL: <<https://www.beatlesstory.com/blog/2018/02/01/dr-kitty-oliver-the-beatles-race-and-segregation/>> [accessed April, 16, 2021]; Kitty Oliver to Ferdinando Fasce, 21 April 2021. Kitty Oliver features prominently in Ron Howard, *The Beatles: Eight Days a Week*, a 2016 documentary film that also comprises an interview with Whoopi Goldberg, in connection with her attendance in the audience at the 1965 Shea Stadium concert.

like monkeys and make queer noises», a bunch of fake idols from whom the Southern youth was strongly urged to stay away, as «Beatles worship is idolatry». For Brian Ward, this was the cultural background exuding racism and religious fundamentalism, upon which the vehement anti-Beatles campaign around the infamous «More popular than Jesus» controversy would build up two years later. The Jacksonville episode underlines how the closing of the musical triangulation across the Atlantic on the part of the so seemingly innocuous and escapist white mop-tops became the site for a critical conversation about race; a conversation that sensitized not only the band, but its audience too, to the persistent realities of Southern race relations, resonating with the UK emerging discussion on the long forgotten histories of Britain's own minorities, racial, and imperial past²⁷.

3. Give peace a chance

In the next few years, under the influence of his second wife and co-conspirator Yoko Ono, a Japanese avant-garde artist with a strong pacifist bent, John's trajectory would become more and more explicitly entwined to the formation of a transnational alternative public sphere across the ocean, as our third episode will show. The place is Washington D.C., the date November 15, 1969, the occasion the Vietnam Moratorium Day rally that was one of the largest single protests in American history. Organized by the Mobe (National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam), the gathering saw a crowd oscillating between half a million and three-quarters of a million people flow through the streets to the Washington Monument. Senators George McGovern and Charles Goodell gave speeches. John Denver, Mitch Miller, Arlo Guthrie, and the touring casts of the musical *Hair* sang. At some point the throng started intoning *Give Peace a Chance*, a song signed by Lennon and McCartney²⁸.

It was not the first time this happened. Beatles' songs had been sung at political meetings of the American Movement in Berkeley in 1964 and 1966 and at Columbia University in 1965²⁹. But the Washington case differed in three major ways. The first dealt with the title and content of the song. All those other cases regarded nonpolitical pieces, from *A Hard Day's Night*, to *If I Fell in Love*

²⁷ WARD, Brian, «Where Are the Freedom Riders? The Beatles and the US South, 1964», cit., pp. 6-12; ID., «The C is for Christ: Arthur Unger, Datebook Magazine and the Beatles», cit., pp. 541-560; «Beatlesville USA», in *Melody Maker*, 29 August 1964, pp. 8-9. On the UK-US transnational emerging discussion about race, HUNT, Megan, HOUSTON, Benjamin, WARD, Brian et al., «He Was Shot because America Will Not Give Up on Racism: Martin Luther King Jr. and the African American Civil Rights Movement in British Schools», in *Journal of American Studies*, 55, 2/2021, pp. 387-417, p. 389.

²⁸ CONCANNON, Kevin, «Lost in the Archive: Yoko Ono and Jon Lennon's Four Thoughts», in *Review of Japanese Culture and Society*, 28, 2/2016, pp. 261-274; WIENER, Jon, «Pop and Avant-Garde: The Case of John and Yoko», in *Popular Music and Society*, 22, 1/1998, pp. 1-16; GITLIN, Tom, *The Sixties. Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, New York, Bantam Books, 1993, p. 394.

²⁹ FASCE, Ferdinando, *I Beatles e i luoghi dei lunghi anni sessanta*, in DONDI, Mirco, SALUSTRI, Simona (a cura di), *Sessantotto. Luoghi e conversazioni di un evento mondiale*, Milano, Unicopli, 2018, pp. 167-168.

with *You*, to *Yellow Submarine*, whose anthemic melody lent itself to be appropriated and adapted by younger students unable to master the words and melody of traditional revolutionary political and union standards³⁰. Instead, in this case it was a tune conceived purportedly as a political pacifist anthem.

Second, even though its composition was officially credited to the corporate authorial couple Lennon-McCartney, the song had not been co-authored by Paul, and was the first one John wrote and sang on a record without the Beatles. It was the most remarkable result of a bed-in, a pacifist event staged with Yoko Ono in Montreal the previous May. Indeed, during the dozens of interviews to which the couple submitted on that occasion, Lennon confirmed the political naivety and inconsistency for which the New Left people on both sides of the ocean had trashed him over the past ten months. That is, since the publication of the controversial Beatles' rocker *Revolution*, the Movement radicals, enraged by the brutal police repression of activists at the Chicago Democratic convention in August 1968, had accused him of adopting too timid and condescending tones towards the youth's rebellion and the thorny issue of the use of violence. Time and again during the ten-day long bed-in in Montreal, when questioned on such political issues as activist tactics, Lennon did not go beyond mumbling vague and at times confused remarks. But almost at the end of the event he won the day by pulling off a song he had just written, based on a slogan («all we are saying is give peace a chance») he had coined for a press conference in Vienna. In the room with John and Yoko were American LSD guru and countercultural leader Timothy Leary and his wife, who also attended the recording session of the piece, held the next morning, alongside a choir including American beat poet Allen Ginsberg and British singer Petula Clark. Promptly released as a single under the newly-coined performing name of Plastic Ono Band, the song entered the charts vying for a top position with the Beatles latest single (incidentally, *The Ballad of John and Yoko*) and becoming a million-seller worldwide, thanks also to a long, raucous live rendition by Lennon himself at the Toronto Rock and Roll Revival at the helm of an improvised incarnation of the Plastic Ono Band featuring Yoko and Eric Clapton in September 1969³¹.

Third, unlike the other Lennon- McCartney songs intoned at political rallies by the anonymous, leaderless students' chanting, the impromptu chorus that erupted at the November Moratorium gathering had quite a remarkable, and for some, unexpected, leader. This was Pete

³⁰ I am indebted to Barry Shank for pointing out how some early Beatles songs «would fit into the category of pop anthems» since, with their «charging introductions and driving choruses [...] brought together audiences across regions and nations». Barry Shank to Ferdinando Fasce, 31 December 2015.

³¹ WOMACK, Kenneth, *Solid State. The Story of Abbey Road and the End of the Beatles*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2019, pp. 81-82; FRONTANI, Michael, *The Beatles Image*, Jackson, University of Mississippi Press, 2007, pp. 173-193; LINSKEY, Dorian, *33 Revolutions per Minute. A History of Protest Songs*, London, Faber and Faber, 2012, p. 171; WIENER, Jon, *Come together. John Lennon in His Time*, cit., pp. 92-96; RILEY, Tim, *Lennon. The Man, the Myth, the Music - The Definitive Life*, London, Virgin Books, 2011, p. 461.

Seeger, the undisputed dean of the American folk revival, with a long history of family and personal radical political commitment that went back to the 1930s and included blacklisting in the McCarthy era. His decision to perform such a song might strike odd, in light of the low esteem in which the Beatles and rock music in general were held by traditional folksingers. But it did not come as a surprise to those familiar with Seeger's ongoing efforts to bridge generational and genre gaps, efforts which included a certain appreciation for at least a few Beatles songs³².

True, initially he had been unimpressed by the pacifist song, at least in the version he had heard, not on the record, but in the form sung by a young woman playing guitar at another peace rally some time before the D.C. one. As he would recall, «I confess when I first heard it, I didn't think much of it. I thought 'That's a kind of a nothing song, it doesn't go anyplace'». But then, when he found himself in front of the biggest audience he had ever faced in his entire life («hundreds of thousand, how many I don't know they stretched as far as the eye could see») for some reason he felt urged to address that audience with the little fragment of the song he had retained from the previous rally. «One little phrase – he howled to the crowd – which I kept singing over and over and over to myself and maybe you like to sing along [...] because it is something we're gonna say to two hundred million American people when we go home.» Even though he did not know if people there had heard it before and could join in singing, he decided to soldier on and intone the famous lines «All we are saying is give peace a chance». What followed would remain in the memory of those present, Seeger later recalled, as «one of the most moving days of their lives [...] we started singing, and after a minute or so I realized it was still growing». Other remarkable folksingers such as Peter, Paul and Mary jumped up on stage and joined in. In their wake, hundreds of thousands were singing it over and over, in a massive display of swinging bodies, flags, and placards, while Seeger shouted a litany of pointed interjections among the verses of the chorus: «Are you listening, Nixon? Are you listening, Agnew? Are you listening, Pentagon?»³³.

On hearing about the rally, Lennon was ecstatic, as he would later remark. «I saw pictures of that Washington demonstration on British TV with all those people singing it, forever and not stopping. It was one of the biggest moments in my life». On another occasion he explained that «in me secret heart I wanted to write something that would take over 'We Shall Overcome' [...] I thought why doesn't somebody write one for the people now. That's what my job is, our job is.» Thanks to his natural knack for publicity, Lennon had struck a chord with the counterculture

³² BUCK, Simon H., «Pete Seeger's Rainbow Quest: televisual old age, intergenerationalism, and US folk music», in *The Sixties*, 12, 1/2019, pp. 69-94; LEIGH, Spencer, *The Beatles in America*, London, Omnibus Press, 2013, p. 201.

³³ «Pete Seeger leads 500,000 people to sing 'Give Peace a Chance' on Moratorium Day, November 15, 1969», URL:< <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dnXSElk12jE> > [accessed 23 August 2022]; WIENER, Jon, *Come together. John Lennon in His Time*, cit., p. 97; WOMACK, Kenneth, *op. cit.*, p. 82; «250,000 War Protesters Stage Peaceful Rally in Washington», in *The New York Times*, 16 November 1969, p. 1.

strategy of engagement with the mainstream media forms, finding a slogan that temporarily gave activists the impression that the ever growing chasm between hippies and politicians might be bridged, against all odds. In the words of one DC protester interviewed by *Newsweek* at the time, «We might not have a leader, but now at least we have a song – and a mass movement doesn't go anywhere without a song»³⁴.

Historian Jon Wiener has convincingly argued that even the seemingly prolix verses accompanying the chorus resonated with a real need felt by the young people who from that moment on took the anthem *Give Peace a Chance* into the streets at peace rallies on both sides of the Atlantic and elsewhere using it as a metaphorical cement of the transnational alternative movement in the making. Denouncing any form of «ism», from madism, to bagism, to shagism, and dragism, in actuality those verses called on people within the antiwar movement to put aside political divisions and sectarianism so dramatically exposed by the recent splitting of the Students for a Democratic Society and unite around the simple demand for peace. As Pete Seeger remarked over a decade later, «Undoubtedly some people wanted to say a lot more than 'give peace a chance'. On the other hand, history gets made when people come to the same conclusion from many different directions. And this song did hit a common denominator»³⁵. The Moratorium confirmed the inclination to reach out across generations and musical genres that Seeger had shown on several occasions in recent years. For Lennon, it was a turning point, his official, albeit by now only virtual, joining of the antiwar movement, along a path of increasing radicalization that would soon entail his direct presence, while pushing him more and more towards the other side of the ocean. Our fourth and final Atlantic crossing bears witness of that radicalization.

4. Activist songwriter

December 10, 1971, Ann Arbor, Crisler Arena. Yoko and John share the stage with a line-up of renowned American radicals at a rally for the liberation of activist John Sinclair. To explain how they got there one needs to retrace a hectic sequence of personal and public changes, unfolding over less than two years, since the Beatles' split. The Beatles' break-up in the spring of 1970 meant the consolidation of the couple's artistic and political collaboration, amidst the persistent haughty criticism, tinged with heavy Orientalist prejudice against Yoko, of the British media³⁶. Between that spring and early 1971 John and Yoko broadened their horizons undertaking a

³⁴ VOGEL, Amos, «I made a glass hammer. John & Yoko at Cannes», in *Village Voice*, 24 June 1971, pp. 13-14, URL: <<https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=KEtq3P1Vf8oC&dat=19710624&printsec=frontpage&hl=en>> [accessed 24 August 2022]; *Lennon Remembers* (edited by WENNER, Jann), New York, Fawcett, 1972, p. 110; LINSKEY, Dorian, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

³⁵ WIENER, Jon, *Come together. John Lennon in His Time*, cit., pp. 97-98.

³⁶ CONNOLLY, Ray, *Being John Lennon. A Restless Life*, New York, Penguin Books, 2018, pp. 318-335.

regimen of therapy with «primal scream» American guru, inflected by New Left rhetoric, Albert Janov, and developing links with radical Left and Black Power exponents in Britain. These concomitant efforts of working on both the personal and the political resulted in joint projects that united those two dimensions in the art and life of the couple. With the decisive help of Yoko, in a year and a half Lennon produced two LPS and one single reflecting his new politically committed persona. In *JL Plastic Ono Band*, his first solo album, he «framed his personal neurosis in terms of repressive familial and socioeconomic systems»³⁷.

Influenced directly by Lennon's growing contacts with New Left British militants Tariq Ali and Robin Blackburn and written explicitly «for the movement, so you can sing it while you march,» the single *Power to the People* capped his swift political evolution. Its text turned the timid perspective assumed in *Revolution* on its head mixing socialism and feminism («I'm gonna ask you comrade and brother/ how do you treat your own woman back home/ She got to be herself/ So she can free herself») in a way rarely heard at the time in a pop music record reaching the top charts on both sides of the ocean. Nor did the tone change substantially in the second, more polished, LP, since the message of universal peace of the title track *Imagine*, heavily inspired by Ono and envisaging a world freed from «greed or hunger», soon gave way to the mesmerizing chant on the fears and nightmares associated with the Vietnam war of *I Dont' Wanna Be a Soldier Mama I Dont' Wanna Die* and the angry denunciation of politicians' hypocrisy («short-haired yellow-bellied sons of Tricky-Dicky») of *Gimme Some Truth*³⁸.

Simultaneously, the couple direct political involvement intensified at full speed, ranging from public relations initiatives against the Vietnam war, to participation in a march for the Irish Republican Army, to financial and propaganda support to the workers' occupation of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders in Scotland in response to the Tory Government's plan to lay them off as «redundants.» Then suddenly came the decision to move to the States. The main reason given was personal, namely Yoko's legal battle for the custody of her seven-year old daughter from a previous marriage Kyoto, who lived in Texas with her father. But soon additional artistic and public incentives persuaded the couple to stay over and plunge into New York City's thriving music scene and countercultural and antiwar movement. This environment gave John and Yoko, who helped her husband fit into what she considered her home town, an impression of openness that they felt lacking in Britain's more rigid and less tolerant society, which had systematically denied Yoko any cultural recognition. In the matter of a few months, through counterculture activists Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman and Black Panther Bobby Seale, they got involved into a

³⁷ WILLIAMS, Paul, EDGAR, Brian, «The Primal is the Political: Psychotherapy, Engagement, and Narcissism in the 1970s», in *American Quarterly*, 70, 1/2018, pp. 79-100, p. 92.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 94; ROGERS, Jude, «Imagine», in *Financial Times*, 11-12 April 2020; ALI, Tariq, *Street Fighting Years*, London, Verso, 2005, p. 333; WIENER, Jon, *Come together. John Lennon in His Time*, cit., pp. 154-162.

series of artistic and political initiatives that culminated in the rally on behalf of John Sinclair. Long time activist, political organizer of the White Panther Party, and manager of the iconoclastic anti-hippie band MC5, Sinclair had been imprisoned on marijuana charges in 1969. His fierce and widely reported criticism of John and Yoko's 1969 antiwar efforts as too snobbish and elitist did not stop the couple from heeding to Rubin's call to participate in the gathering. The original plans comprised a serie of speeches by such movement leading figures as Rubin himself, Bobby Seale, veteran pacifist Dave Dellinger, and New Left's prominent organizer Rennie Davis, all straight from the Chicago conspiracy trial. Music was provided by New Left singer-songwriter Phil Ochs. Fearing he might not fill the hall, Rubin turned successfully to John and Yoko. The announcement of their participation was enough to sell out the concert-rally in a few hours³⁹.

Packed with 15,000 midwestern college kids, the Ann Arbor Crisler Arena hosted an event that lasted more than seven hours. In addition to the political speeches, it featured Allen Ginsberg chanting his usual «Om-m-m-m-m,» Ochs singing a song about Nixon, a local band playing Presley's *Jailhouse Rock*, and Steve Wonder, a surprise guest who had volunteered to perform after hearing of Lennon's commitment, singing and speaking against Nixon and Agnew. Lennon appeared with Yoko at 3 a.m., his first live performance in the United States since the last, dissatisfying Beatles' concert in San Francisco five years earlier. The crowd cheered when he introduced his set by saying «We came here not only to help John [Sinclair] [...] but to show and to say to all of you that apathy isn't it, that we can do something. Okay, so flower power didn't work. So what. We start again.» Then, accompanied by a makeshift band comprising Rubin on bongos, he started singing *Attica State*, followed by *The Luck of the Irish*, Yoko's feminist anthem *Sisters*, and finally *John Sinclair*, the song Lennon had written for the occasion. Urging the judge to «set him free», *John Sinclair's* lyrics («If he was the CIA/Selling dope and making hay/He'd be free, they'd let him be/Breathing air, like you and me») alluded to revelations that the CIA was involved in heavy heroin trafficking in Southeast Asia and contrasted the agency's impunity with Sinclair's languishing in a cell for selling just two joints. Equally riveting was the appeal of *Attica State*, with its chorus yelling «free the prisoners, jail the judges» and invoking «truth and justice» for the prison's inmates, most of them black, part of the 1970s mass incarceration discriminatory policy that comprised overwhelmingly an African American population⁴⁰.

The piece reflected Lennon's long standing interest in racial issues since the times of Jacksonville. This interest had been enlivened by his recent contacts with Bobby Seale, who would

³⁹ MATTSON, Kevin, «Leather Jackets for flowers: the death of hippie And the birth of punk in the long, late 1960s», in *The Sixties*, 12, 1/2019, pp. 3-16; COLLINS, Marcus, *The Beatles and Sixties Britain*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 180-187; WIENER, Jon, «War Is Over! If You want It: John and Yoko, 40 Years Later», in *The Nation*, 27 December 2009; ID., *Come together. John Lennon in His Time*, cit., pp. 167-188.

⁴⁰ The Attica uprising is examined by THOMPSON, Heather Ann, *Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and Its Legacy*. New York, Pantheon Books, 2016.

remember him as one who «had political consciousness» and «wanted to really do something»⁴¹. Soon thereafter John would amply prove his concern with the black cause by repeating the Ann Arbor performance with Yoko at a concert held in Harlem to raise funds for the dependants of those killed in the Attica prison riots, and supporting the Black Panthers' Free Breakfast for Children program. No less important, he accepted the proposal of the Campaign to Free Angela Davis, the African American philosopher, Communist Party member and Panthers' sympathizer charged with murder, kidnapping and conspiracy in the «Soledad Brothers» affair, to co-write with Yoko *Angela*, a song about her case⁴².

The concert-rally had an aftermath no one, let alone the most purist New Left politicians who looked condescendingly on the gathering, had anticipated: within less than three days John Sinclair was released on bond by a board of appellate judges albeit on a much smaller scale, like the Moratorium gathering the Ann Arbor rally suggested that different strands of New Left politics could occasionally find a common cause. As Wiener points out, in this case, countercultural mediatic guerrilla, based on the presence of rock celebrities, had been effectively harnessed to help one radical local community in its struggle. Ann Arbor marked Lennon's emergence as a Movement's songwriter, seriously engaged to navigate the tension between individual and collective concerns so vividly felt within the left and society at large at the turn of the decade. His work showed how the «first-person music» that was then emerging, and that Lennon himself had significantly contributed to with his first two solo albums, could coexist with larger public commitments and feed a radical agenda combining the personal and the political. Not accidentally the concert coincided with the beginning of an increasingly systematic attention devoted to Lennon by the FBI, an attention that would eventually result in a four-year long, and ultimately unsuccessful, campaign to expel him from the country⁴³.

⁴¹ WIENER, Jon, *Come together. John Lennon in His Time*, cit., pp. 180-181. In his recent wide-ranging *The N-Word in Music: An American History*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2022, ebook, pp. 82 ff., historian Todd M. Mealy argues that in fact «incapable of giving up heteronormative and white-skin privileges that would have challenged the established power structure he attacked so ferociously in his music», Lennon failed to acknowledge «the world's racist structures by assuming racism was limited to the actions of individuals». While rightly pointing to the songwriter's theoretical shortcomings and limitations on the racial issue, in my view Mealy's interpretation does not detract from the overall significance of Lennon's temporary, but deep, political commitment. Especially if one places it against the backdrop of the all-powerful and most racist corporate music industry in which he strove to navigate.

⁴² GLENN, Alan, «The day a Beatle came to Town», in *The Ann Arbor chronicle*, December 27, 2009, URL < annarborchronicle.com/2009/12/27/the-day-a-beatle-came-to-town/index.htm > [accessed 24 August 2022]; «John Sinclair Freedom Rally», URL: < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqbHsUcuN6I> > [accessed 24 August 2022]; ROBERTSON, JOHN, *The Art and Music of John Lennon*, London, Omnibus Press, 1990, pp. 148-149; WIENER, Jon, *Come together. John Lennon in His Time*, cit., pp. 188-192, and 212; SALPUKAS, Agis, «15,000 Attend Michigan U. Rally to Protest Jailing of Radical Poet», in *The New York Times*, 12 December 1969, p. 76. On Angela Davis, who was eventually acquitted of all charges, DAVIS, Mike, and WIENER, Jon, *Set the Night on Fire. L.A. in the Sixties*, London-New York, Verso, 2021, pp. 473-487.

⁴³ TOCHKA, Nicholas, «John Lennon's Plastic Ono Band as 'first-person music': notes on the politics of self-expression in rock music since 1970», in *Popular Music*, 39, 3-4/2020, pp. 504-522, pp. 517-518; WIENER, Jon,

Three conclusions emerge from this whirlwind journey through a decade and a half of Lennon's Atlantic crossings. First, the journey provides a glimpse on how music moved in and out of the U.S., the cradle of rock 'n' roll, in the «long Sixties,» through networks of people, ideas, corporate and grass-root infrastructures, amidst obstacles and opportunities, in circles of actors and investments that might expand and narrow, according to different circumstances. It confirms the advisability of still using the notion of «Americanization», though in a much more critical and restrained manner than in the past, with a clear sense of its spatial and chronological limits, as well as of the two-sided circulations of values and practices and reciprocal impact across the ocean, and their larger connections on a global scale⁴⁴.

Second, for all its peculiarities, Lennon's trajectory casts light on the multilayered relations between music and politics, intended in an extensive way, that John Street has examined through the two entwined categories of «politics of music», that is, the level of political commitment allowed by the strict rules of the commercial music system, and «music of politics,» that is, an explicit use of music by both institutional and oppositional political actors. His story sketches the twisted path through which a rock star moved from the former, exemplified by the Jacksonville episode, to the latter, as in the Ann Arbor concert. It invites additional investigation on the merits and pitfalls of music celebrities' involvement with public causes and the impact, positive and negative, it had on their artistic output⁴⁵.

Finally, crossing the Atlantic alongside Lennon has also meant dealing with a crucial element of the «long Sixties,» their culture, and their music. This was the drive to tear down barriers, embrace and articulate different realms such as the cultural and the economic, the personal and the political, the vernacular and the avant-garde, across gender, ethnic, and racial lines. The most recent research on that decade is increasingly emphasizing such a tendency, finding more connections and porousness within the larger cauldron of the liberating impulse underpinning society and music in that era than it was previously acknowledged⁴⁶. With all his serious contradictions and limitations⁴⁷, Lennon may well provide an excellent vantage point from which to pursue further this line of enquiry⁴⁸.

Come together. John Lennon in His Time, cit., p. 195; ID., *Gimme Some Truth: The John Lennon FBI Files*, cit. For an appreciation of Lennon's political legacy by a distinguished political historian see KAZIN, Michael, *American Dreams. How the Left Changed a Nation*, New York, Knopf, 2011, p. 217.

⁴⁴ NOLAN, Mary, «Rethinking Transatlantic Relations in the First Cold War Decades», in *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 53, 1/2014, pp. 19-38; KUISEL, Richard, «The End of Americanization? or Reinventing a Research Field for Historians of Europe», in *The Journal of Modern History*, 92, 3/2020, pp. 602-634.

⁴⁵ STREET, John, *Music and Politics*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2012, pp. 41-61 and 140-163.

⁴⁶ BACH, Damon, *The American Counterculture: A History of Hippies and Cultural Dissidents*, Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2020; BURKE, Patrick, «Trouble Every Day: White Allyship and the Sunset Strip Riots», in *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, 34, 2/2022, pp. 51-68.

⁴⁷ MEALY, Todd, *The N-Word in Music: An American History*, chapter 3, provides ample evidence in this respect.

⁴⁸ High on the research agenda on Lennon should be his utterly understudied controversial relations to women, and especially his existential and artistic partnership with Ono, a kind of partnership that was still

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URL: < <https://www.studistorici.com/progett/autori/#Fasce> >

very rare in the highly male chauvinistic rock world of those days. On this see the impressionistic JONES, LESLIE-ANN, *Who Killed John Lennon? The lives, loves, and deaths of the greatest rockstar*, London, John Blake, 2020 and many interesting insights in LINDAU, Elizabeth Ann, «Mother Superior. Maternity and Creativity in the Work of Yoko Ono», in *Women and Music. A Journal of Gender and Culture*, 20, 1/2016, pp. 57-76; STEVENS, Carolyn, *op.cit.*, pp. 97-122; FELDMAN-BARRETT, Christine, *A Women's History of the Beatles*, New York - London, Bloomsbury, 2022, pp. 75-106.