TELL TCHAIKOVSKY THE NEWS:

THE PROBLEM OF ROCK AND ROLL AND THE RISE AND FALL OF THE AMERICAN MUSICIANS' UNION 1940-1970

By

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City
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Abstract

Tell Tchaikovsky the News: The Problem of Rock and Roll and the Rise and Fall of the American Musicians' Union

by

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This dissertation is a case study of the relationship between the American Federation of Musicians, the labor union that represents professional musicians in the United States, and rock and roll music between the years 1940 and 1970. I seek to demonstrate how it happened that a particular labor union acted against its own economic interests as a way to contribute one piece to a puzzle that explains of how the labor movement as a whole has systematically undermined itself over the past three decades. It would have been in their interests for the musicians' union to aggressively organize rock and roll musicians and involve them in the culture and politics of the union, but for reasons having to due with the history and culture of the musicians' union itself, they did not. The exclusion of rock and roll by the union – most of the members were trained in the classical and jazz idioms - was also a betrayal of the working class, since rock and roll was about the affirmation of leisure as well as the sorrows of hard work at low pay, two issues that should be front and center in the culture of the labor movement. The musicians' union, once one of the most progressive unions in the labor movement, successfully tackling the difficult issues of automation and job loss, became one of the most reactionary when it attacked rock and roll musicians. Unfortunately for the musicians' union, the exclusion of rock and roll came at a very high price, as the structure of the music recording industry was dismantled and reconstructed around rock and roll music as the epicenter of the industry, a transformation that displaced the musicians’ union from the core of the industry, a move that cost them millions of dollars in revenue and thousands of members. This dissertation examines how culture shapes social action, as well as the conditions that led to the self-demise of a labor union, with the intention of showing how the labor movement might learn from its mistakes in the past how to succeed in the future.

PREFACE:

“IT’S THE CULTURE, STUPID!”

THE PROBLEM OF ROCK AND ROLL IN THE MUSICIANS’ UNION

“Nothing is more beautiful than a guitar save perhaps two.”

-- Frederic Chopin

In his bid for President in 1992, Bill Clinton ran on a platform that included the now (in)famous slogan, “It’s the Economy, Stupid!” Clinton and the Democrats were looking to take advantage of the weak economy under George Bush Sr., hoping that American voters would be most likely to consider jobs, or rather, the lack of “good” ones, the most important issue in the election. Numerous polls that year had revealed that “likely” voters consistently ranked the economy the most important issue in the election. The phrase: “It’s the Economy, Stupid” was coined by Clinton’s campaign manager James Carville, who scribbled the phrase on a sign, and hung it inside Clinton’s campaign headquarters in Little Rock, Arkansas, in order to keep everyone on point. It worked; Clinton upset George Bush Sr. in 1992, and for a while, it seemed like it was common wisdom, at least for those on the left, that economic issues trumped everything else in American politics, including cultural issues. Americans, it seemed, consistently voted for politicians who were easy on their pocket books. For the academic left as well, there was a near consensus that somehow economic issues matter most in the affairs of human beings. Even if most American social scientists reject Marxism as a theoretical model, many would agree with Louis Althusser that, “in the last instance,” it’s the economy that determines modes of social action[1].

Twelve years later, the political problem seems to be the opposite, namely, that Americans, or rather, working class Americans in particular, inexplicably vote *against* their economic interests. George Bush Jr., was re-elected in 2004 in spite of his poor record on the economy, because his campaign manager, Karl Rove, used cultural issues like abortion and gay marriage as wedge issues to divide the working class just enough to defeat John Kerry in what was a very close race. Kerry, for his part, picked up where Clinton had left off, by recycling a version of the “it’s the economy, stupid” slogan, assuming that Clinton’s extraordinary popularity was based on his “success” with the economy. Kerry tried his best *not* to confront the Republicans on cultural issues; instead, he took the so-called “middle road” on cultural issues. On the gay marriage issue, Kerry said he was for “civil unions” rather than gay marriage in an attempt to have it both ways; appease the cultural right a little bit by keeping gays from getting married, but also appease the cultural left by giving “rights” to gay people seeking marriage. The strategy for the Kerry campaign was to seem “moderate” on cultural issues while hammering away on economic issues. Kerry made the outsourcing of jobs, corporate welfare, the repeal of tax cuts for the rich, and affordable healthcare the main planks in his platform, but he lost, and it baffled those on the Left, because it seemed like Kerry was *relatively* “worker friendly,” whereas, it seemed as if there couldn’t be a more anti-labor President than George Bush Jr. Bush’s dismantling and reconstruction of the National Labor Relations Board along conservative lines, the dismantling of OSHA and his “reform” of the rules that regulate overtime pay as well as the change in the definition of

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[1] See Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, translated by Ben Brewster (Verso, 1996).

"supervisory" positions sent a clear message to workers and American labor unions: the Bush Administration is not your friend. Yet, millions of workers helped "W" keep his job, as if to say – without Nietzsche's sense for irony – "please, more pain, more suffering!"

Since the Bush Jr. phenomenon, academics and liberal media pundits alike have tried to explain why workers vote against their economic interests[2]. How was it that this time around culture, not the economy, made the difference in the election? The "war on terrorism" an the war in Iraq were also major issues in the 2004 election, but Bush's margin of victory was the result of cultural wedge issues, not the war on terrorism or the war in Iraq. It seemed as if for much of the working class in America, it was more important to keep gay men and women from marrying each other than to stem the flow of good paying jobs overseas and across the border to cheap labor markets. A fitting campaign slogan for Karl Rove and the Bush team would have been something like: "It's the Culture, Stupid!"

It's not just the working class that sometimes acts against its own economic interests. The representatives of the working class, the American labor unions, also have an historical record of acting against their members' economic interests, and the reasons why they have done so usually turn on the question of culture: namely, the ways in which culture shapes conflicting identities and interests, but also how culture is a site for struggle, in particular, class struggle. In short, culture is a principle intervening variable in modes of social action.

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[2] See Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter With Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (Metropolitan Books, 2004)

Such is the subject of this dissertation, a study of the reception, or rather, the *rejection* of rock and roll music by the American musicians' union, the American Federation of Musicians (AFM). It would have been in the economic interests for the AFM to aggressively organize rock and roll musicians beginning in the late 1940s, but they did not. On the contrary, the musicians' union *dismissed* rock and roll music for reasons having to do with their culture. The AFM considered rock and roll a passing fad at best, and the expression of juvenile delinquents at worst. In either case, for the musicians' union, rock and roll was never taken as "serious" music, since the rank and file of the musicians' union consisted of musicians trained in the classical and jazz idioms, musicians whose highbrow aesthetic elitism prevented them from understanding, or coming to terms with rock and roll and its particular aesthetic. On the contrary, the AFM lined up with those who considered rock and roll to be "filth," which in the 1950s included cultural conservatives and most of so-called "middle" America.

The highbrow aesthetic that shaped the point of view of the musicians' union on rock and roll music has to do with class and race. Rock and roll has its roots in Southern black and white working class subcultures, and the controversy around rock and roll in the 1950s was partly the consequence of rock and roll's integrating effect on society at large. Mainstream America wasn't ready to accept white kids' enthusiasm for black music, and the AFM, for its part, was still mostly a racially segregated union with a history of separate locals for black and white musicians and separate pay scales for white and black musicians, where black musicians were invariably paid less than white musicians for the same work. The musicians' union didn't fully integrate until 1964, when the Federal Government forced all labor unions to integrate under the rules of the

Civil Rights Act passed the same year. Ironically, however, many established black jazz musicians who were members of the musicians' union *also* dismissed if not outright attacked rock and roll music, making them odd bedfellows with racist whites who attacked rock and roll on the grounds that it "lowered" white folks down to the level of black folks. Of course, the black jazz musicians' attack on rock and roll was grounded in class distinction, rather than racial difference. The various attacks on rock and roll that stemmed from racism on the one hand, and elitist, class based attacks on the other, demonstrate the complexity of the issue in the 1950s. The black bourgeoisie, which included bebop jazz musicians, joined the mainstream American middle class backlash against the "filth" of rock and roll, while for "white" America class was also at times displaced through race. When Middle America and "professional" musicians attacked Elvis Presley, it was about social class, but when Middle America attacked Chuck Berry, class was over-determined by race.

In the sixties, rock and roll became a principle vehicle for the counter-culture, and when the labor movement as a whole clashed with the counter-culture, the musicians' union once again had a reason to dismiss rock and roll. But the union paid a high price for their rejection of rock and roll, because rock and roll led popular culture and the music market away from the musicians' union, and restructured the music industry along non-union lines. As a result the union lost its place atop the highest perch in the music industry. The AFM paid handsomely in the form of lost revenues and declining membership as a result of their decision not to go after rock and roll musicians and involve them as equal members in the union.

Finally, rock and roll is largely a record aesthetic, since it came into being with the development of novel recording technologies. The musicians' union has, for good reasons, a history of resistance to recording technologies, because those technologies have cost them tens of thousands of jobs. As a result the union has pursued an anti-record aesthetic of sorts, which helped structure the union's antagonistic relationship to rock and roll. There is irony here, because the musicians' union led a series of successful strikes against radio and record companies in the early 1940s and their achievements that followed from those strikes had implications that spread far and wide for all American workers, but the possibilities of fulfilling the promise never came to be.

When the AFM forced the record companies to pay a royalty to the union for every record sold as a way to raise revenue for their members who lost their jobs because they were replaced by records either on radio or live venues, they demonstrated the very real possibility of the promise of the combination of labor productivity and technology: namely, more wealth for less work. When the record companies agreed to pay a royalty to the union, it sent the message that capital – the big corporations - has the resources to take care of both employed and unemployed workers, which is one small step away from saying the modern capitalism creates more than enough wealth to allow everyone to work less *and* enjoy more; more time for leisure and more money for a rising standard of living. It was a truly radical accomplishment on the part of the musicians' union, but they, themselves, spoiled their greatest achievements and betrayed the working class as whole when they turned against rock and roll music and failed to aggressively organize its musicians. These are the main issues I seek to make sense of in this dissertation.

While this study focuses on one labor union and the role of culture in the shaping of interests and social action in that particular union, it points toward more general questions having to do with the American working class and the future of the labor movement. If we are concerned with explaining why workers and their unions act against their own economic interests, we must turn to an examination of culture, and the ways in which culture is a site for struggle, including how "culture wars" shape identities and situate subjects in the process of class formation. In short, perhaps the "superstructure" – to borrow a term from Marxism again – is not a dependent variable in both class formation and class struggle. In short, it's a serious theoretical mistake to subordinate culture to the economy or to consider the superstructure as somehow an epiphenomenon of the base. My view of culture is influenced by the Frankfurt School and post-structuralism (including Althusser), because I see culture as "relatively independent," that is, as an independent "moment" in class formation that reacts back upon and shapes the form of class relations and class struggle.

The idea for this dissertation grew out of a study on the music industry I compiled for Local 802 of the AFM in New York City. In that study I showed how the music recording industry had undergone significant structural changes that resulted in the outsourcing of the production of records to non-union companies, a group of companies referred to by the union as "non-signatory" record labels. I argued that just as is the case in manufacturing and information technology industries, the major corporations that dominant the entertainment industries have found ways to avoid doing business with labor unions by sending formerly union jobs to places where unions do not exist. Sometimes the places are over seas, or across the border, and sometimes they are within the borders of the U.S. In either case, the corporate practice of "outsourcing" of jobs to cheaper labor markets has been the dominant feature of the so-called "new economy." Union workers who work for corporate conglomerates in the core of the economy are laid off and the corporations either contract the work "out" to sub-contractors who are non-union employers, or they open a new plant or office of their own in regions where unions are non-existent due to the local political culture.

In the music recording industry, the major record labels now control the industry by monopoly over the distribution of records. The actual production of records (CDs) matters very little in the "post-industrial" or "post-Fordist" scheme of things in the core of the music industry, at least for the corporate conglomerates that make the big bucks. As a result, the corporations are no longer vertically integrated in the way they once were. It's true that fewer and fewer companies control more and more of the industry, and power is now more narrowly distributed and centralized among a few giant corporations, but production is dispersed all across the globe. In short, we live in paradoxical times: power is more *centralized* and production is more *de*-centralized. There are now only 4 major record labels, and they control close to 90% of the market for music CDs, but they exercise their control over the market through their monopoly on distribution. The production process has been spun off and out of the everyday business operations of the major record labels. For the most part they leave the production of records to so-called independent producers and so-called "independent" record labels[3]. The "indies" in turn, depend totally upon the majors to distribute their CDs. Ultimately, that's bad news for the union, and for working musicians everywhere because for the most part, the indies do not do business with labor unions. As a collective, the indies do not hold a labor contract with the American Federation of Musicians. It's more or less the same pattern in all American industries now. Corporations "outsource" work to non-union subcontractors as a cost cutting strategy. Union density in America today is down below 10% of the workforce, which is an historic low since the late 1920s.

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[3] See Mike Roberts, "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag: Big Music's Post-Fordist Regime and the Role of Independent Music Labels," in *Rhythm and Business: The Political Economy of Black Music*, Edited by Norman Kelley (New York Akashic Books, 2005)

In short, my study was aimed at informing the musicians' union that the rules of the game have changed, and that there needs to be new ways to think about making the companies that control distribution somehow responsible and accountable for the working conditions at record labels that they may not own, but whose products they distribute. It's either that or get serious about organizing non-union employers. As it stands now, the majors can claim that because they are not the employers of the musicians whose records they distribute, they have no obligation to either ensure that those musicians are paid a good wage or have decent working conditions. It's the now typical situation of sub-contracting throughout the entire U.S. economy. Corporations in the U.S. don't really make anything anymore. They have other, smaller companies – sub-contractors – make the stuff, and it is no accident that the sub contractors are hostile to labor unions. Still, since the top of the food chain in the music industry lies at the feet of the major record labels, which are themselves owned by gigantic multi-national corporate conglomerates that rake in tens of billions of dollars of revenue every year, they have the resources to do the right thing, which is take care of the musicians who are out there making records that they distribute and profit from. In short we need to "outsource" the labor movement to the periphery of the economy.

In the course of my research, I began to wonder what the musicians' union was up to around the time that the corporations were restructuring the ownership and business patterns in the music industry along the lines of the now dominant outsourcing model. I found that the corporations that dominate the music industry changed the rules of the game at the same time that rock and roll emerged as the most popular music in America, the mid 1950s. It was about a 10-15 year period of restructuring, the same time period the rock and roll music emerged and developed into the largest share of the market for music. What I found, surprisingly, was that the AFM had dismissed rock and roll music and its culture as a fad or in the words of an elected officer in the union, rock and roll was viewed as "crap." As a result, the AFM completely neglected the musicians who made rock and roll records. We know now, of course that rock and roll was not a fad, and I make the case that the musicians' union made a big mistake by not taking rock and roll seriously in the years between the early fifties and late sixties. The union's dismissal of rock and roll made it easier for the corporations that dominate the music industry to restructure the industry along non-union lines, since the restructuring was also along the lines of rock n roll music. In short, the musicians' union gave rock and roll away, and as a result lost a significant amount of power in the industry.

There is irony all around, for not only did the union shoot itself in the foot economically by dismissing rock and roll, but rock and roll is also a product of the working class in America, and the "essence" or substance of rock and roll - if it can be said that such an essence exists - is the *affirmation* of leisure and the material demand for a better life. In the words of Chuck Berry, "rock n roll is about freedom." The quest for shorter work hours and more leisure time is the labor movement's reason for existence.

But by dismissing rock and roll, the musicians' union unwittingly betrayed the labor movement, because they negated the *message* of rock and roll, namely, the desire for more free time for leisure activities and a bigger slice of the economic pie. Rock and roll music revealed the lie about delayed gratification and hard work as the means to achieve the American dream. On the contrary, rock and roll music voiced the working class demand for a piece of the pie right now! While the 1950s were a period of relative affluence for American workers, labor unions and dissident rank and file groups nonetheless continued to fight for their share of the economic pie, and that's what rock and roll was all about from the late 1940s through the late 1960s. Surely, Samuel Gompers, the "father" of the American labor movement rolled over in his grave at the idea that a labor union would negate the desire for more freedom, a better material lifestyle and more leisure time, but that's what happened with the musicians' union and rock and roll, even if it was unintentional.

The reasons why the AFM dismissed rock and roll have to do with its culture: the union simply considered rock and roll to be an unworthy aesthetic, because the music was thought to be the product of "morons," "trash," and "juvenile delinquents," black and white. In short, the AFM adopted a very conservative view point on rock and roll music, a view point that stemmed from the union's high-brow culture, what I refer to as an "elitist aesthetic." But the AFM's stance on rock and roll was also over-determined by the clash between the labor movement as a whole and the counter culture of the sixties, of which rock and roll played a central part. I mean to use the "counterculture" broadly to include not only the so-called "hippies," but also the New Left student movement and the militant Black Power movement. Rock and roll music – broadly defined - was central to all these components of the sixties “counter-culture.” The working class content of rock and roll, which included most importantly the desire for more leisure time and the rejection of delayed gratification was embraced by the counterculture of the 1960s, but ironically labor unions did not get on board. Instead the labor movement aligned itself with cultural conservatives.

The musicians’ union was once one of the most powerful and progressive unions in America, and their historic victory over the record companies in two separate strikes in the 1940s was perhaps the most important and far reaching accomplishment of any union in the 20th century, including the famous sit down strikes by the auto workers in the mid 1930s. When the musicians’ union forced record companies to pay them a royalty on every record sold as a way to raise revenue for musicians who were put of work because they were replaced by records on radio and in the juke joints, it sent the message to all workers that corporations have the resources to take care of both their own workers *and* those on unemployment. In short, the wealth produced by labor and technology together creates the conditions for both a rising standard of living for all *and* less work. Unfortunately, the musicians’ union itself ultimately spoiled their historic victory in the great recording ban of 1942, because they undermined their own position as leaders of the labor movement by dismissing rock and roll. In the span of a few decades, the musicians’ union went from being the most progressive to one of the most conservative and reactionary unions in the American labor movement.

One can’t help but speculate about how different things would be right now, for American workers, if the “culture wars” between the labor movement and the counter-culture had played out differently. What if the musicians’ union had embraced rock and roll in the fifties, and what if the labor movement had found common ground with the counterculture of the sixties? If the labor movement had been more involved in shaping the debates about cultural issues like race, gender and sexuality – as opposed to focusing solely on the so-called "bread and butter" issues of wages – and if the labor movement had remained on point and never lost its focus on the radical demands of less work for more pay, rather than get side tracked by cultural conservatives, maybe there could have been higher levels of labor solidarity and union density among the working class as a whole. Perhaps that kind of solidarity would have carried the labor movement through the dark ages of Reaganomics. Who knows? Perhaps the 2004 election would have had a different outcome.

The story of the musicians' union and rock and roll music sheds light on important problems that have crippled the labor movement since the late 1960s. It is my goal to use my case study of the musicians' union and rock and roll to make more general claims about what's the matter with the labor movement and how we might think of ways to spark its revival. For those of us who have a stake in a resurgent labor movement, it's crucial that we learn from the mistakes of our past.

I would like to thank my dissertation supervisors Juan Flores, Bill Kornblum and Stanley Aronowitz for all of their guidance, encouragement and support. I would especially like to thank Stanley Aronowitz, the chair of my dissertation committee. Stanley inspires the people around him by example. The energy, excitement and determination that he generates in everything he does is truly remarkable. If I accomplish a fraction of what he has in his life and career, I will consider my self a success. I'd also like to thank my family and friends for all their support throughout my years in graduate school, especially my brother Paul, my mother Kathleen Herington and my father Nick. Without their support I would not have finished. My best friend and intellectual partner in graduate school, Kristin Lawler, the smartest graduate student from my cohort, has been and continues to be a superb source of intellectual inspiration. Finally, my wife Anabel Bejarano, who makes it all possible; thank you Anabel, for everyday we have together. I dedicate this dissertation to you.

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INTRODUCTION

UNION MAN BLUES:
THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF MUSICIANS AND ITS CULTURE

"I ain't common, I know that cuz I got class I ain't never used."

-- Louis Jordan

In June of 1969 the American Federation of Musicians, the oldest and largest labor union that represents professional musicians in the United States and Canada, published an article on the rock music band Creedence Clearwater Revival (CCR) in their official newspaper, the *International Musician*. The rock band from San Francisco was riding a wave of popularity following the release of their self-titled debut album in 1968, which had two singles, "Susie Q" and "Proud Mary," reach *Billboard* magazine's top ten that year. The article, written by Jay Ruby, was mostly about Creedence, including information about their musical influences, and biographical information for all the band members, but it was also about the San Francisco Bay Area music scene of the late 1960s, which in addition to CCR, included such rock bands as Jefferson Airplane, Country Joe and the Fish, The Grateful Dead, and Janis Joplin and Big Brother and the Holding Company. Ruby refers to the Bay Area music scene of that time period as America's answer to the British Invasion of rock bands from the mid 1960s. The article as a whole is a fairly interesting and informative piece, but nothing spectacular in the world of music criticism and music industry reporting.

What *is* very interesting, however, about Ruby's article on CCR is that it was the first time the American Federations of Musicians (AFM) featured a full-page article in their newspaper that was dedicated to a rock and roll band[4]. If fact, it was only the second time that the very *words* "rock and roll" appeared in print between the covers of the *International Musician*, a monthly newspaper that first went into circulation in 1901, five years after the AFM itself was established as a chartered craft union of the American Federation of Labor under president Samuel Gompers[5]. Curiously though, the words "rock and roll" didn't exactly roll off of the keys of Jay Ruby's typewriter; on the contrary, they appear indirectly from the mouth of John Fogerty, the lead singer and songwriter for Creedence Clearwater Revival. In the article, Ruby refers to Creedence as a "pop" band; it is only in a passage from the text where Ruby quotes Fogerty that the phrase "rock and roll" emerges. In that quote, Fogerty refers to himself and his band mates as rock and roll musicians, but that's the only instance in the entire article where that particular phrase is mentioned[6]. In five other places, Ruby refers to CCR as a "pop" band, never as a rock and roll band[7]. It seems odd to read that article about CCR today, more than 30 years after it was written, and find that the words rock and roll, words which seem so innocuous to us now, are almost nowhere to be found in such a relatively lengthy article about a band we now consider to be permanent members in the Pantheon of "classic" rock music. How could anyone today *not* use the phrase "rock and roll" or the term "rock" in a conversation that involved a description of Creedence Clearwater Revival?

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[4] See Jay Ruby, "Creedence Clearwater Revival," in *The International Musician* (June, 1969 p. 5)

[5] The first time the *International Musician* published the words "rock and roll" was in 1968. See Nat Hentoff, "The Pop Explosion," *International Musician*, April 1968.

[6] Some music critics have argued that "rock and roll" was "rhythm and blues" before the mid 1950s and later became "rock" after 1965. In many ways I agree with these descriptions, and while it might prove interesting to trace the divergent styles of rock and roll from the rhythm and blues of the late 1940s to the rock of the late 1960s, I'll refrain from making these distinctions unless there is a specific issue that requires an explanation of stylistic differences. Otherwise, I use the terms "rhythm and blues," "rock and roll" and "rock" interchangeably since my focus is on the point of view of the American Federation of Musicians, and from their point of view – at least that of their leadership – there was no difference.

[7] The same is the case with the 1968 article by Nat Hentoff. The headline for Hentoff's article reads, "Pop Explosion." The words rock and roll appear in the subtitle, as a sub-category of pop music, rather than a distinct idiom of its own right like jazz or classical.

Like many of the successful American rock bands from the late 1960s, the members of CCR grew up listening to rhythm and blues and early rock and roll music on the radio, including the music of Wynonie Harris, Big Joe Turner, Roy Brown, Amos Milburn, T-Bone Walker, Chuck Berry and Little Richard as well as the famous *Sun Records* artists – Elvis, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis and Carl Perkins among others. Indeed, a whole generation of kids who were playing in rock and roll bands all over the states in the early to mid 1960s, a generation that included CCR, had already cut their teeth on the rock and roll and rhythm and blues of earlier generations of musicians, whose careers spanned the years between the mid 1940s to the mid 1950s. That same '40s and '50s generation of rockers - Wynonie Harris, Chuck Berry etc. - were also idolized by the "British Invasion" rock bands from 1964 including most famously the Beatles and Rolling Stones, but surprisingly, Chuck Berry and his generation of rock and roll musicians were never recognized by the American Federation of Musicians, and the Beatles themselves were the subject of much controversy for the musicians' union in 1964, when the AFM attempted to ban the group from playing in the United States[8]. If a rock and roller like Chuck Berry ever had any interactions with the musicians' union, it was by *accident*. Berry may have played a live gig at a venue that was *already* a unionized venue, and he most likely did make a few recordings on labels that were *already* union shops, but the AFM never actively *organized* rock and rollers, nor did they ever recognize rock and roll musicians as members of any importance if and when any rockers became card carrying members of the AFM. *On the contrary, rock and roll musicians were the pariahs of the musicians' union, and for that reason, most rock and roll musicians worked for non-union record labels.* It seems odd, at first glance, that rock and roll, the roots of which lie in the American working class (black and white), would be completely ignored by the labor union that represents the interests of working musicians in America.

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[8] The story of the AFM and the Beatles is covered in more detail in chapter five.

Rock and roll, America's most popular and perhaps most culturally distinct music, emerged as far back as the early 1940s (some would say even earlier), yet there was no mention of any of the permutations of rock and roll inside the pages of the musicians union's newspaper until nearly thirty years later[9]. The ancestors of rock and roll, including blues, rhythm and blues, hillbilly (country), were all more or less dismissed by the leadership of the AFM. If one were to use the articles from the *International Musician* as a guide to what was happening in the American music industry in the years between 1942 and 1970, it would seem as if there were no such thing as rock and roll in America or anywhere else. Even as rock and roll records were racing up the *Billboard* singles charts as early as 1951 – to say nothing of urban rhythm and blues records that topped the charts almost a decade earlier, in 1943 - there was no recognition of the "new" music by the American Federation of Musicians. On the other hand, many famous jazz and classical musicians, conductors, composers, band-leaders and arrangers graced the cover of the union's newspaper over the same years (1947-1970), including Louis Armstrong, Jascha Heifetz, Miles Davis, Zubin Mehta, Paul Whiteman, Duke Ellington, Gene Krupa, Leonard Bernstein, Dizzy Gillespie and Aaron Copeland to name but a few. Bernstein, Mehta, Gillespie and Whiteman were all on the cover of *IM* in 1968 alone, fully one third of all the issues in that year, in addition to the numerous other times they graced the cover earlier in their careers. Lengthy articles on the inside of the paper were dedicated to whomever the AFM placed on the cover of its newspaper. Also inside the union's newspaper were columns devoted to reporting on the union's business affairs, national and local labor issues in American politics, sections about where the most "popular" jazz and classical musicians were playing, and instructional columns devoted to playing styles and techniques in the jazz and classical idioms. Rock and roll, on the other hand, did not get so much as a peep from the official mouthpiece of the musicians' union in spite of all the record breaking sales figures for rock and roll singles and albums in the emerging global marketplace for music, and perhaps more importantly, in spite of the growth of rock and roll *criticism* by writers like Ellen Willis, Jon Landau, Bob Christgau, Ed Ward and Greil Marcus, who wrote for magazines like *The New Yorker*, *Village Voice, Rolling Stone, New York Times, Crawdaddy*, and *Creem.* These music critics had informed the world that rock music was indeed a "legitimate" aesthetic, worth the attention of "serious" art critics, well before the staff at the *International Musician* decided to publish their article on Creedence Clearwater Revival. Rock music critics also made convincing arguments for the aesthetic specificity of "rock" music based on criteria that made it different from "pop" music, in contradiction to Ruby's description of CCR and other San Francisco groups as mere – in the eyes of the union - "pop" bands[10]. Other people working in the music industry had already heard the news as well. As early as 1953, the first year a rock and roll single took the number one spot on the *Billboard Magazine* top ten charts, it was clear to the managers of independent record labels and their distributors that the music of the American working class – rock and roll – was here to stay. Indeed it already had a rich history in American culture[11].

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[9] In the early 1940s the music that we know today as rock and roll was still referred to as rhythm and blues. And of course there were other important influences on the development of rock and roll besides rhythm and blues. Country music, bluegrass, popular swooners like Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby, the blues and swing jazz all played an important role in the development of rock and roll. I discuss all these influences in later chapters. I also realize that referring to rock and roll as America's most distinct music may seem controversial to some, but I make my case in later chapters. In fact, it is implicit it my argument about why the musicians' union refused to recognize rock and roll on aesthetic grounds. There is a large body of literature on the aesthetic significance of rock and roll, and it seems today that most music critics would agree that rock and roll is as "good" as any other music regardless of the criteria used to analyze music. See the writings of Ellen Willis, Greil Marcus and Bob Cristgau for an analysis of the aesthetic value of rock and roll music.

Interestingly, however, is that while the staff of editors and writers for the *International Musician* ignored rock music in their own articles and columns, the companies who paid for ad space in their paper did not. There are numerous advertisements for electric guitars – the emblematic instrument of rock and roll - inside the covers of the *International Musician*, starting as early as the mid-1950s. More importantly, beginning in the early 1960s guitar manufacturing companies like Fender and Gibson were specifically targeting younger, "hipper" rock and roll musicians with their advertisements for both electric guitars and state of the art amplifiers that could, according to the ads, make it possible to play "really loud." Their ads also included catchy phrases like "freaked out sound," phrases that were clearly aimed at rock and roll musicians. In one example from 1968, Fender placed an ad in the *International Musician* that had a picture of Jimi Hendrix playing the latest *Stratocaster* model of electric guitar, which was, and remains, the most popular guitar used by rock musicians[12]. By 1968, Hendrix was already an icon for up and coming rock and roll guitarists, and Fender capitalized upon that as much as possible, since they knew that no honest musician or music critic could deny the profound and immediate impact that Jimi Hendrix had on American music and culture in general. Yet, the musicians' union's own newspaper staff never "officially" acknowledged Hendrix - arguably *the* greatest American guitar virtuoso of all time - in any of its own articles. Clearly, the guitar companies were aware that rock and roll musicians were reading the *International Musician*; otherwise why would they place their advertisements there? It is safe to assume that at least *some* AFM members who received the union's newspaper were rock and roll musicians, even though their point of view on music was grossly under-represented in print. So why, in spite of all the conditions stated above, would the American Federation of Musicians ignore, and in many cases even condemn, America's best and most popular music until well into the 1970's? How could the musicians' union ignore the significance of accomplished, talented musicians like Jimi Hendrix, and the music they played, the roots of which stem from the working class?

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[10] See Jon Landau, "Rock and Roll Music," *Rolling Stone*, 1 April 1971.

[11] The first rock and roll record to go number one on the *Billboard* charts was "Crazy Man, Crazy," by Bill Haley and His Comets. I make the case the rock and roll is the music of the American working class, rather than exclusively an expression of American "youth" culture as so and so have argued. Certainly youth culture shaped rock and roll in important ways, but the roots of rock and roll music run much deeper than "youth" culture. My interpretation of rock and roll as a working class phenomenon will be clear in the chapters that follow.

[12] *International Musician*, October, 1968, page 23.

The answer - while complicated because of many over-determined factors which include the advancement of more sophisticated recording technologies, changes in the structure of the recording industry and changes in U.S. labor law - boils down to aesthetics, and lies ultimately in the *discourse* of the AFM bureaucracy; both in certain factions of the leadership circles and among the elite rank and file. By the use of the term discourse, I mean to draw attention to the *culture* of the musicians' union, and in particular to an elitist, highbrow aesthetic that occupied the imagination of certain segments of the union's leadership as well as the established, famous musicians among the rank and file. The established culture of the AFM, the roots of which go back to the turn of the century, was opposed to the culture of rock and roll because: (a) rock and roll was considered an “illegitimate” aesthetic on the grounds of traditional, formalist aesthetics, (b) because rock and roll emerged within African-American and Southern white working-class subcultures and eventually became a core feature of the sixties counter-culture, and (c) because of the medium in which rock and roll emerged, namely records. Rock and roll was and is essentially a record aesthetic, whereas the AFM has had, and to some extent continues to pursue an anti-record agenda. The culture of the musicians’ union was also opposed to the culture of rock and roll because rock and roll was coded as “deviant” culture (point “b” above). Rock and roll was coded deviant in the 1950s because it was largely developed by African-American subcultures and appropriated by rebellious working class white kids who themselves were coded as “delinquents” by both the musicians’ union and society at large. Rock and roll was coded as deviant again in the 1960s because it was at the core of the sixties counter-culture: “sex, drugs *and* rock and roll.” For both of these reasons, as well as the reasons stated above, the musicians’ union kept their distance from rock and roll music for thirty years.

The AFM establishment considered rock and roll music to be a menace, an unworthy art form, and that attitude stemmed from the cultural elitism of the union’s established members, an elitism that has a long history going back to the end of the 19th century. The year 1967 seems to be the moment when that elitist attitude began to show signs of weakness, at least among a few of the younger musicians in the union[13]. The key event that first earned rock and roll music a *smidgen* of recognition from the younger rank and file members of the musicians’ union was the release of *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely*

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[13] The same issues would return in the decades that followed rock and roll as the musicians’ union thumbed their noses at punk rock in the late 1970s, rap music in the late 1980s and hip hop in the 1990s.

Hearts Club Band by the Beatles. In the words of an officer from AFM Local 47 in Los Angeles, "it wasn't until *Sgt. Pepper's* that we [the musicians' union] began to take any notice of rock and roll.[14]" No doubt *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* was a brilliant break out album for the Beatles, and for rock music in general, but according to the Beatles themselves, there were 20 years of good "rock and roll" music before the Beatles released their landmark 1967 album, years of music that the AFM ignored, because they considered the rock and roll phenomenon a passing fad. What's more, the musicians' union labeled rock and roll performers as "entertainers" *not* musicians, since most rock and roll musicians learned to play music from listening to records rather than from reading music, as well as because rock and roll musicians emphasized "non-musical" aspects like dancing in their performances, including most infamously, Elvis' pelvis. Presley's sexuality and his famous gyrating pelvis was seen by the AFM as vulgar entertainment, not musicianship[15]. Thirty years seems like a long time for a "fad," but that was the official line of the AFM, assuming the union even had a "line" on rock and roll music. It would be more accurate to say that the AFM considered the rock and roll music of the 1950s and 1960s a fad, whereas the roots of rock and roll that stretch further back into American folk music were simply dismissed and ignored by the musicians' union on the grounds that folk music wasn't sophisticated enough to be seriously considered by its members. Of course, not all members of the American Federation of Musicians were anti-rock and roll, and the split over the "problem" of rock and roll in the union was part of a larger historical struggle over the identity of the musicians' union that pre dates rock and roll by several decades.

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[14] Interview with author; according to the interviewee, the release of *Sgt. Pepper's* by the Beatles in 1967 had a major impact on young musicians in the AFM. It was the first time that established rank and file members of the union took rock and roll seriously. I will discuss this interview in more detail in later chapters.

[15] In chapter four I discuss the case of Tommy Dorsey and his extreme dislike of Elvis.

The main conflict over the identity of the AFM turned on the question concerning the adjective in their identity, namely, *professional* musicians: how is "professional" to be understood? Are professional musicians artists or workers? If both, then under what specific conditions could they be both without conflict? Were they artists who happened to work, or workers who also made art (music)? Which mattered more, working or being an artist? Indeed how could there not be a conflict, if being an artist meant not compromising your expression under any circumstances, including receiving a paycheck? From this point of view, receiving money for your "art" means that someone else controls your activity and therefore your art becomes a means toward an end, not an end in itself; as a consequence your artistic integrity is compromised, not "pure." These kinds of questions go back to the origin of the musicians' union. In fact, at the very founding of the American Federation of Musicians in 1896 there were fights among the rank and file from the previous musicians' "union" – the National League of Musicians (NLM) - over whether they were to remain a professional *association* of "artists" and stay with the League, or become a labor *union* of "workers" by joining the American Federation of Labor (AFL), but under a new name, the American Federation of Musicians. Younger musicians, who typically labored at a second job to supplement their income from performing music, favored joining the American Federation of Labor, whereas older, established musicians who were able to make a living exclusively from playing music – symphony musicians in particular – opposed joining the AFL on the grounds that it would "debase" their art[16]. In short, the musicians' union struggled over a fundamental, hierarchical duality in American musical culture: a binary opposition based upon a distinction between music as "cultivated," and oriented toward the problem of morality, and music as "vernacular," oriented toward utility and entertainment, and *not* concerned with morality and idealism. This binary in American musical culture has operated much in the same way as Derrida has described the operations of cultural dualisms in Western culture more generally. At the center of the binary lies the image of Western man, while the non-Western "Other" is banished to the margins[17]. Of course, Derrida's point was to demonstrate that the center relies, indeed requires, the presence of the marginal "Other" to exist in the first place, since difference is prior to being. Deconstruction, Derrida's mode of theorizing, takes as its task, the dismantling of hierarchy inherent in the variety of binary oppositions in Western culture. In American music, "art" music, or classical music exists as the center, around which folk music is marginalized, but alas, the center never holds. I discuss this issue in more detail in later chapters.

In addition to the pleas of "artistic purity," that framed the craft of musicianship as a moral issue, the musicians' union also struggled over the more common identity markers of race and class. Indeed, the question of whether musicians were artists or workers – which also a way of saying entertainers, as opposed to artists – has, in the history of the musicians' union, always already been displaced through race and class. Working class black and white musicians have struggled against the stigma of "worker/entertainer" both inside and outside of the musicians' union, and their music has been associated with *popular* culture, which is commonly understood as mass entertainment, rather than authentic, or "pure" art. I will argue in the pages that follow that the struggle between different factions in the AFM over the *identity* of the musicians' union that followed from the questions of "taste" (good versus bad music) and "craft" (trained versus untrained musicians), explains why the American Federation of Musicians refused to recognize rock and roll as a legitimate music and its performers as "skilled" musicians for nearly 30 years, and because the taste/craft question was also displaced through the identity markers of race and class, rock and roll was a lightning rod for controversy in the musicians' union in the 1950s.

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[16] I cover these issues in more detail in the next chapter.
[17] See Jacque Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by Alan Bass (New York, University of Chicago Press 1982).

In some ways, the story of rock and roll and the musicians' union is a repetition of the "jazz question" that drove a wedge between AFM members at the beginning of the 20th century. The musicians' union condemned jazz for many of the same reasons they condemned rock and roll, but jazz wasn't as controversial as rock and roll, for either the AFM or for society at large. Jazz moved quickly up the ladder of cultural hierarchy; it took less than a decade for the musicians' union to accept jazz musicians in large numbers, and by the late1920s jazz was the popular music in both black and white America. Furthermore, academic musicians quickly recognized that jazz had "legitimate" aesthetic value, although only after jazz was forced into a "symphonic" form[18]. The period of controversy over jazz was relatively short compared to the controversy over rock and roll, and ironically, jazz musicians who were, themselves, once discriminated against, would, in the 1950s, join the chorus of public outcry against the so-called "depravity" of rock and roll music. Another important issue, however, is that jazz pre dates recording technology by a few decades, whereas rock and roll emerged with records. Rock and roll is essentially a record aesthetic, where the record is the reference point; in jazz, however, it is the performance that counts mainly as the referent. I discuss issue in more detail below.

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[18] I cover the transformation of jazz in the next chapter.

For many rank and file members as well as established leaders in the musicians' union during the late 1950s and early 1960s, rock and roll was seen to be a passing fad designed by morally suspect record labels and manipulative disc jockeys specifically for impressionable teenagers, whose "innocence" made them passive consumers and therefore perfect "victims" for enterprising, "scum bag" record label owners. This was the "official" reason why rock and roll was not considered "serious" music. Even as it was clear to industry insiders writing for the trade magazines like *Billboard, Cashbox* and *Variety* that rock and roll wasn't going away, the AFM continued to look down on the music as a "fad" artificially created by sleazy record labels.

Still, there were dissenters in the musicians' union regarding the question or rock and roll. Cultural or aesthetic elitism didn't entirely dominate union politics and policy over the years, even during the period of rock and roll between the years 1940-1970. There were important exceptions to aesthetic elitism in the history of the AFM, including the union's most popular and controversial leader, James Caesar Petrillo, who spent most of his career in the AFM fighting against the aesthetic distinction between good and bad music and the related division between "trained" and "untrained" musicians. Petrillo, who was president of the AFM from 1940-1958, was among the minority in the union bureaucracy that believed that in order for the AFM to maintain its identity as a *labor* union, and in order to be *potent* labor union, the issue of taste could not be allowed to influence union policy, because aesthetic preference would inevitably divide the union and break down solidarity. He broke from the cultural elitism of the previous president, Joseph Weber, but it didn't last, because Petrillo's successor, Herman Kenin, steered the union back onto the high road of aesthetic elitism in AFM politics and policy during the years when rock and roll emerged as the dominant music in America. It is, perhaps, no coincidence that the AFM had its most success as a labor union under the leadership of Petrillo, which included the greatest victories in the union's history - the recording bans of 1942 and 1946[19]. But a little more than a decade later, the fortunes of the musicians' union changed beginning with Kenin's presidency, when the AFM, like other unions in the U.S. entered a period of decline in the 1960s that spanned several decades and continues today.

The second aesthetic issue that drove a wedge between the AFM and rock music, had to do with the essential *medium* of rock and roll music: namely, records. Unlike jazz and classical music, where the performance and the composition are the principal aesthetic objects, in rock and roll music, it is the *recording* that is essential. In jazz and classical music it is the performance on the one hand, and the composition on the other, that gives a piece of music its "aura." It is a different matter with rock and roll. The technology of recording, or the particular *sound* of a recording is want counts, which means that the instrument or *technology* of recording is as much a part of the musical piece as the musical instruments that are played in the process of the recording. Sound engineers working in the studio play as important of a role as the musicians playing instruments in the construction of the record[20]. In short, rock and roll music is grounded in a *recording* aesthetic, and the culture of rock and roll musicians is a record culture, unlike classical and jazz musicians, whose cultural history precedes the development of recording technology. Rock music, on the other hand, *came into being* with records.

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[19] I discuss these strikes in more detail in later chapters.

[20] Rock and roll musicians have made these arguments. For instance, Eric Clapton had argued that his band Cream would never have had the success that it did if it were not for Tom Dowd, who was the sound engineer that recorded *Disraeli Gears*. According to Clapton, Dowd's influence in the recording studio was just as important as any of the band members.

There are two reasons why rock and roll is a record culture. On the one hand, most rock and roll musicians learn how to play music from listening to records rather than by reading music. Records had, to borrow an argument from Walter Benjamin, a democratizing effect on the field of music and the institutions that create musicians, in so far as it is relatively easy for people of lesser means to obtain records, and practically anyone can pick up a guitar, put their record on the turntable and learn how to play[21]. Compared to the relatively expensive and time consuming training in formal music schools, records provided a cheap and immediate entry into the realm of music performance. Records opened the doors for droves of working class kids who yearned to play music. Plus, once the performance of a musical score is on record, everyone can own it, appropriate it and participate in it. In this way, records deconstruct the "aura" of a piece of music just as the photograph does to the "aura" of the painting, which is what Benjamin discusses in his essay on the significance of mechanical reproduction in the field of art: painting. Benjamin celebrated the demise of the "aura" of a work of art, because it frees us from the shackles tradition. For Benjamin, deconstructing the "aura" or a work of art means that *everyone* can now become artists. Specifically, it's the working class that benefits from the development of technology in the mechanical reproduction of the work of art. Benjamin's famous essay is a classic application of the

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[21] I am borrowing Benjamin's famous argument from his essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," which is from the collection of essays published in *Illuminations*. Benjamin's argument about the loss of "aura" and the democratizing effect of technology on art was based on photography and its impact on painting, but I think it works equally as well with recording technology in the area of music, especially rock and roll.

Marxist argument that the forces of production (technology) break down the relations of production (hierarchy and domination).

Secondly, as stated above, recording technology is part of the aesthetic of rock and roll, which is to say that the sound of a song is in part dependent on the particular way in which it was recorded, and the engineering of the recording counts as much as other factors including the arrangement of instruments, rhythms, melodies, etc. As a consequence, when we refer to a rock and roll song, we are usually referring to a recording, *not* a performance as in the case of jazz, and not a composition as is the case in classical music. We implicitly know this when we go to a rock and roll concert and we expect the performance to sound like the record, so in this way the recording is the referent for our aesthetic judgment in rock and roll. In short the relationship of rock and roll and technology is much more profound and immanent than is the case with either jazz or classical music.

The American Federation of Musicians, however, has been, and in some cases continues to be *opposed* to recorded music for two reasons. The first reason is completely understandable: the musicians' union has lost tens of thousands of its members to recorded music, both on vinyl and on film. Beginning in the late 1920s, both on radio and in theatres, live musicians – the majority of whom were AFM members – were eliminated in huge numbers and replaced by "canned" music, specifically, records on radio and "talkies" in the theatres. These were very bad years for the musicians' union, and the massive hemorrhaging they suffered from the development of recording technology had a profound impact on their collective conscience: in short, recording technologies equals permanent loss of jobs and the end of many careers in music. The musicians' union's fight against recorded music has been, historically, a fight to save jobs. Since then, it has been AFM policy to promote live music over canned music in as many public venues as possible, arguing that live music provides an audience with a more complete and more authentic aesthetic experience than does canned music, or records. These arguments were derived from traditional European values; namely, live music is *better* than canned, period. Secondly, the AFM policy has been that its members should be able to read music, since reading music has been an essential aspect to the craft of musicianship and the training of professional musicians. Rock and roll musicians, by and large, don't read music and this difference was a major reason the AFM didn't organize rock and roll musicians for twenty some odd years. It was the combination of these two cultural factors – the cultural elitism of the AFM and the record culture of rock and roll – that created the conditions for the marginalization of rock and roll music by the musicians' union. In short, *cultural* factors are center stage in the sordid story of the musicians' union and rock and roll music.

Lastly, the musicians' union was opposed to rock and roll music because rock and roll music became synonymous with the sixties counter-culture: "sex, drugs and rock *and* roll." During the era of protest in the sixties, the white working class in America became, ironically, a *conservative* cultural force, led by its representatives, the labor unions. By the sixties, many union members had "achieved" the American Dream: a house in the suburbs and a semi-middle class lifestyle. As a result, many union members were alienated from both the "radicalism" of the student-led New-Left movements, the counter-culture "hippies," and the militant Black Power movement of the sixties. Union workers didn't understand the *cultural* radicalism of the New Left and the Black Power movement, and the misunderstanding led to conflicts, the most infamous one being the violent assault led by construction workers against Viet Nam War protesters in New York City in 1970. The image of construction workers in hard hats carrying American flags and beating peaceful demonstrators who opposed the war in Viet Nam is emblematic of how labor unions became part of the conservative establishment in the U.S. This broad context of conflict between the labor movement and the sixties counter-culture provided extra motivation for the musicians' union to ignore and in some cases, condemn rock and roll music.

The cultural reasons for why the AFM excluded rock and roll from its collective identity is, however, not the only interesting issue at hand, because rock and roll would eventually turn the entire structure of the music recording industry upside down. The explosion of rock and roll in the 1950s restructured the recording industry in profound ways that eventually displaced the American Federation of Musicians as a major player inside the core of the music recording industry, and the union itself is partly to blame for its own displacement from the center of the industry precisely because it ignored rock and roll for so long and neglected to aggressively organize the musicians who played rock and roll. The musicians' union was once one of the most powerful labor unions in America, able to demand and obtain significant concessions from the corporations that controlled the music industry. The AFM was also a major player in national politics in the period between the late 1930s and late 1950s, and along with other powerful unions, shared the space at the apex of the American economy with the dominant corporations, although as junior partners in the booming war and post war economies. Unfortunately, however, like other unions that were once central players in the American economy – e.g.

the United Auto Workers, the United Mine Workers, the garment workers union and the steel workers union to name a few – the American Federation of Musicians has, since the 1960s, lost much of its power, especially in the recording industry. The AFM was at one time powerful enough to bring the entire recording industry to a screeching halt, but today after decades of structural realignment in the industry, the musicians' union has lost influence and control over almost half of the market for recorded music (compact discs) in America, and no longer has the means to organize a strike of any magnitude[22]. The core of the active members in the musicians' union are jazz and classical musicians, the same constituency as 70 years ago, but today jazz and classical music together are but 5% of the market for recordings (compact discs). Twice in the 1940s, the AFM was able to pull its members out of recording studios all across the states, conduct successful long-term strikes and win concessions from the corporations that owned the major record labels; but beginning in the late 1950s and continuing throughout the 1960s – the years when rock and roll became dominant - the major record labels developed a pattern of outsourcing the production of records to non-union "independent" record labels that served as a kind of non-union subcontractor in the recording industry. Most of the non-union independent labels from that era recorded rock and roll music almost exclusively, the same music that the AFM considered a fad. Of course we know today that it wasn't a fad at all, and that rock and roll totally dominated the market for records in the 1950s and has ever since. Today the multi-national corporations that control the music recording industry do so through a monopoly on *distribution*; production matters very little in the grand scheme of things, and the independent labels remain mostly non-union shops[23].

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[22] Roberts, "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag."

[23] I discuss this issue in more detail in later chapters.

A strike in the recording industry by the musicians' union today would be almost meaningless since so much of the production of records takes place in non-union shops by musicians that are most likely *not* members of the AFM. Even if those musicians' are members of the union, their membership is largely the work of serendipity; they are far from being active members in the union. The relative impotence of the musicians' union in the recording industry today means that the American Federation of Musicians acts more like organization that provides services, managing pension funds and health insurance plans for its *existing* members, rather than a labor union, because a labor union by definition is an organization that focuses on organizing new members and obtaining wage increases and better working conditions for its members through conducting strikes and contract campaigns designed to extract concessions from employers. In short, the AFM has shared the fate of the rest of the labor movement, as labor unions across the board have lost their ability to flex their muscles and get results that they once could before the great U-turn in the economy in the late 1960s[24]. But what is perhaps unique about the musicians' union is that its relatively weak structural position in the music recording industry today is largely a product of its own doing, namely, its culture[25]. Examining the musicians' union's decline in the recording industry sheds light on the larger issue, which is how to explain the decline and demise of the labor movement in America as well as its potential revival.

There has been much written about why unions and the labor movement as a whole have been in decline in the U.S. since the late 1960s. Explanations vary from the acceleration and intensification of competition in the global economy, outsourcing of jobs, automation and mechanization, anti-labor legislation passed by Congress and several anti-labor Presidential administrations since the New Deal, the entrenched conservatism of the South, and the revitalized corporate assault on union labor[26]. There are fewer explanations, however, that point the finger at unions themselves as partly to blame for their own demise in the past few decades. Certainly outsourcing in the global economy, and automation at home have taken their toll on union density in the United States in recent decades, and nobody could deny that corporations and their government henchmen have been on the attack against unions since the late 1960s. Nonetheless, corporate bad guys and changes in the structure of the economy fail to explain the entire story behind the decline of organized labor in the states. On the contrary, organized labor in America has often times acted against its own interests, especially over issues about the identity of its membership as well as the identity of potential members, that is workers who fit the definition of their bargaining unit but are yet unorganized. Typically, in American unions and the working class generally, the struggle over collective identity – a struggle that has a violent past - takes place along the lines of class (which is displaced through craft and "skill"), race and gender. Racism and sexism among the rank and file of labor unions has severely damaged organized labor in the U.S., problems which have only recently been addressed by the AFL-CIO[27]. In addition to the problems of racism and sexism inside the house of labor, splits among the U.S. working class have occurred between skilled and unskilled workers or between what labor historians have referred to as the split between the "labor aristocracy" which consists of skilled workers in the craft unions and unorganized, unskilled "industrial" workers who historically have been neglected by the leadership of the craft unions.

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[24] See Bluestone and Harrison, *The Great U-Turn*. (New York Basic Books 1988)

[25] For a good history of the decline of the labor movement see Paul Buhle, *Taking Care of Business*.

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[26] See Kim Moody, *An Injury to All*, Bluestone and Harrison, *Great U-Turn*, and Stanley Aronowitz, *False Promises.*

[27] See *New Labor Forum: A Journal of Ideas, Analysis and Debate*, (No. 1, Fall 197).

The concept of a labor aristocracy comes from Lenin, who argued that the proletariat in the first world benefits from the hyper-exploitation of impoverished workers in the developing countries on the periphery of the world economy. Labor historians have modified Lenin's concept to apply it to the formation of the working class within the borders of the United States. For example, many of the older craft-based unions of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) never organized unskilled workers on *principle*. It was an organizing strategy of the AFL – since its inception in 1886 - to focus specifically on craft workers, which by definition excluded millions of unskilled workers who were finally organized by the industrial unions of the Congress of Industrial Organizations beginning in the 1930s after failed attempts by the International Workers of the World (IWW) in the first decade of the 20th century[28].

The situation of the American Federation of Musicians in the history of American labor unions is a complicated one. Like most AFL craft unions in the early years of the post-bellum labor movement, between the 1880s and 1920s, the AFM often times excluded working musicians from membership on the basis of race, gender and "skill" (class). Gender was a particularly conspicuous marker, since most AFM locals barred women from membership altogether. In the economy as a whole, in 1900 fewer than 3 percent of women workers were members of unions, compared to 20 percent for men. Most women who worked in the music industry at that time worked as piano teachers in grade schools. Very few women musicians performed in commercial venues on a professional basis at the turn of the century. But unlike other craft unions in the

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[28] See Art Preis, *Labor's Giant Step*.

American Federation of Labor, the AFM, because it is a union of *musicians*, has to also deal with the thorny issue of "taste," or aesthetic preference – that is, the question of good vs. bad music - a problem that almost sabotaged the initial formation of the union in 1896. The issues of craft and training in the musicians' union have often times served as a veil for the real issue: a culture of elitism based on taste and class. It can be very complicated process to judge the "skill" of any particular instrumentalist because the "taste" or aesthetic preference for one style of music versus another gets in the way of measuring the skills of a musician who plays in a style that may be "distasteful" to the one doing the measuring. Furthermore, "skill" cannot be reduced to training, since many of America's best and most "skilled" musicians – Jimi Hendrix stands out as an excellent example – never had any formal training. Anyone who has had to make an argument for why one band or another is a "good" band knows how messy it becomes when it is time to lay down the criteria for what counts as "good" music and "talented" musicians. This was a significant problem for the musicians' union, because by definition, as a craft union, it could only include "skilled" members of the trade, but often times, preference for a particular genre of music was *confused* with the technical skills involved in playing music in general. In short, what makes the AFM unique among labor unions is the intensity of the problem of keeping skills separate from the question of taste. In this way then, the identity of the musicians' union was divided against itself along the lines of race, gender and class, with the last two variables operating through *taste*. The last marker of identity, class/taste, was of course *over-determined* by the first two factors, especially race[29]. In fact, I will make the case that the identity conflict over craft in the musicians' union over the question of rock and roll was really a class issue that was displaced through race[30]. In other words, the discourse of hierarchical duality between highbrow and lowbrow culture was sometimes displaced when the issue was supposedly over the "craft," or the training of a musician. "Trained" musician was *code* for musicians – usually "white" - who played in the European classical idioms and who were able to read music. The musicians' union considered the ability to read music an essential aspect to the craft of musicianship, but this was also a veil, or displacement of sorts, since many other genres of music do not rely so heavily on the graphic representation of music in notational form as does the classical tradition of European, bourgeois music. This combination of cultural markers was set against folk music, as a way to "Other" American folk music and exclude large numbers rural working class folk musicians black and white from the AFM since, historically, much of folk music has been performed by musicians who don't read music[31]. In other instances, the terms "good" or "trained" were often times code for "white" musicians, and these splits were used to justify the institutionalized segregation in the AFM that lasted for several decades. On the other hand, when black musicians, particularly jazz musicians who were recognized by the union as "skilled" or "trained" spoke disparagingly about other musicians, as they did about rock and roll musicians beginning in the early 1950s, then "skill" was a *class* marker and again it was a way to mask or displace the discourse of hierarchical duality of

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[29] I'm using the term "over-determined" much in the same way as Althusser as a way to avoid the reduction of complex relations to simplified cause and effect explanations. "Over-determined" is a term used to

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emphasize how variables like "class" and "race" are not "things" or "things-in-themselves" but rather sets of relations that develop dialectically and become displaced through one another in a variety of specific social contexts.

[30] Racism, existed in the American Federation of Musicians, much like in other unions, but as white working class musicians began playing rhythm and blues and rock and roll, the struggle over taste and its effect on union policy, class became an equally determining factor in the split inside the union.

[31] By "folk" music I mean music of "country" folk, specifically "blues" and "bluegrass" music. In the early part of the 20th century American folk or "roots" music was referred to by the recording industry as "race" and "hillbilly" music. I discuss this issue in more detail in later chapters.

high and low culture. The irony cuts both ways in the musicians' union; cultural elitism is an equal opportunity discriminator.

In the pages that follow I will argue that the union's refusal to recognize rock and roll was in large part the result of the historic split in rank and file identity formation that fractured the union's image into competing representations: artists vs. workers. The fractured identity of the musicians' union became manifest in attempts to establish a policy of cultural elitism in the AFM through the creation of an aesthetic hierarchy that culminated in a system that categorized music and musicians as "trained" and "untrained." The contradiction over taste would eventually cost the musicians' union dearly, because as we now know rock and roll became the most popular music in America. The AFM essentially shot itself in the foot by ignoring rock and roll music and clinging to an ossified, elitist aesthetic, because they lost millions in revenue as well as thousands of potential members.

When rock and roll upended the structure of the music industry, the musicians' union circled its wagons around its core members, the jazz and classical musicians and clung to a withering New Deal pact between labor, capital and the government[32]. Rather than organize rock and roll musicians and respond to the changing structure of the recording industry with new organizing strategies, the AFM chose to maintain is strong hold among its traditional base of jazz and classical musicians and hope that the major record labels would continue to renew favorable labor contracts. Their strategy failed miserably because the major record labels have by and large outsourced production to record labels that do not recognize the union. Structural changes in the industry and the economy as a whole explain many of the problems faced by the musicians' union and organized labor in general, but the *culture* of the musicians' union is a key variable in the story behind the decline of the American Federation of Musicians, because the split in their identity over the issue of "good" and "bad" music prevented the union from adequately responding to fundamental changes in the music industry, which included most importantly, the major record labels' policy of outsourcing of the production of records to non-union "independent" labels that produce the so-called "bad" music. For more than two decades the musicians' union excluded rock and roll from its purview, and all the while the major record labels continued to shift the production of rock and roll records to the independent labels, which were almost exclusively non union shops. As long as the union continued to ignore rock and roll music, the major labels could continue to restructure the recording industry along non-union lines. Ignoring rock and roll on aesthetic grounds meant, ultimately, that the union would do very little in the way of organizing rock and roll musicians, much less include them in the leadership circles of the bureaucracy that set union policy on matters of organizing and contract negotiations. The outsourcing of the production of rock and roll records by the major record labels that began in the 1960s eventually became the norm for the entire music recording industry and the effects on the musicians' union has been devastating.

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[32] I discuss this in more detail in later chapters.

The destructiveness of cultural elitism that plagued the musicians' union had far reaching effects for the entire labor movement because not only did cultural elitism sabotage solidarity in the musicians' union, but it also sabotaged what could have been the most radical achievement of the musicians' union: the historic compromise between the AFM and the major record labels that followed the recording ban of 1942. When Decca records agreed to terms set by the AFM in 1943, the musicians' union won one of the most significant confrontations between labor and capital in the 20th century. By winning the strike, the AFM was able to force record companies to create a fund to be used to compensate union musicians who had lost their jobs as a result of being replaced by records at radio stations and jukeboxes in live venues like taverns. “Taxing” the sale of records raised money for the fund. A small percentage of each sale was set up as a royalty payment to the union. Thus the union received royalties on every record sold in the U.S. that was produced in a union shop. In 1943, that meant about 80% of all record sales were contributing to the union. The agreement between the AFM and the record companies was a great success for the musicians, but it had widespread implications for the entire labor movement as well, because for the first time, capitalists were forced to take responsibility for jobs that were lost at the hands of automation. It could have set a radical precedent in the history of labor relations in America because it was based on the premise that labor saving technology reduced demand for workers, but at the same time there was enough wealth produced by capitalism to both reduce labor hours by spreading the work around *and* raise the standard of living by paying workers more for less work. In short, the 1943 recording contract between the AFM and the record companies foreshadowed the very real historical possibility that the working class could have more for less: more material comforts, more material goods, more free time *and* less work. The record companies were making enough money that they could pay both the musicians who made the records *and* support musicians who did not make records. It was a truly radical achievement, and in the context of the epic struggle of labor unions to shorten working hours and push up wages, it provided a concrete example of that possibility.

Unfortunately, however, the union itself sabotaged the historic achievement of the 1943 labor agreement between the AFM and the recording companies. The turn against rock and roll music by the musicians' union meant that solidarity among musicians would wither, and record companies would exploit the "reserve army of labor" that existed among the growing pool of unorganized, non-union rock and roll musicians. If the union had organized rock and roll musicians rather than banish them to the margins of the industry in the early years of rock and roll, the union might have been able to continue to increase its pressure on record companies and continue to set the example for the entire labor movement in the drive to realize labor's quest for more leisure time *and* a higher standard of living. How ironic, too, that rock and roll music, which contains as its *raison d'etre* the unequivocal affirmation of leisure would be banished by a labor union.

The following pages in this dissertation are divided into five chapters. In chapter one, I trace the origins and transformation of the elitist aesthetic in the American Federation of Musicians from the rank and file debates over unionism and the cultural status of professional musicians in 1896 through the annual convention of 1901, the year the president of the AFM publicly denounced ragtime music. I discuss the issue of cultural elitism in the musicians' union within a broader context that involves a discussion of the emergence of the social construction of a fundamental duality between highbrow and lowbrow aesthetic taste in American musical culture at large during the mid 19th century, and the historical development of that duality that shaped the controversy over jazz music in American society in the first 20 years of the 20th century. Here I consider the rapid change in the status of jazz music from outcast subculture to mainstream pop culture entertainment, and finally to high culture, or "art." I examine the conditions that altered the perception of jazz music, in the mindset of both mainstream America and the musicians' union. During these years, jazz moved up the culture ladder from lowbrow to highbrow culture and the American Federation of Musicians was at the center of this transformation. I end the chapter with a discussion of the fledgling "race" and "hillbilly" music recording industries and a description of the first encounter between AFM musicians in New York City and Southern working class folk music when Jimmy Rodgers was invited to make a record in New York. I show how this encounter foreshadowed the conflict between rock and roll musicians and the AFM during the 1950s and 1960s.

In the second chapter, I examine the Petrillo years of the AFM, in particular the 1940s, which was the period of the union's greatest strength and most intense militancy. It was during theses years that the AFM won many strikes and labor disputes with both the broadcast radio companies and the major label record companies. I discuss the significance of the recording bans in 1942 and 1946 and the historic labor agreement reached between the AFM and the major record labels, which required that the recording companies take responsibility for musicians' who lost their jobs as a result of the use of records on radio and in jukeboxes. I also discuss important strikes on the radio industry and the remarkable solidarity enjoyed by the AFM during these years. I end the chapter with a discussion on the issue of automation and the impact of recording technology on the labor process in the music industry. It was also during these years that the musicians' union developed a policy of promoting live music as a way to save their jobs. The result was a kind of Luddite perspective on records that would contribute to the unions' marginalization of rock and roll music in the 1950s. I consider the irony and contradiction expressed in the union’s ability to see into the future of recording technology and its negative impact on the employment of musicians, while simultaneously turning a blind eye toward the future of working class culture and its music in America. The union’s remarkable victory in the great recording ban of 1942 was one of the most important events in the history of the American labor movement, and yet the musicians’ union itself spoiled what could have been the most progressive and radical achievement of the labor movement, because the cultural elitism which had plagued the union for many decades divided the rank and file, contributed to the decline of the union’s power and prevented the union from fully reaching the potential of its historic achievement on the issues of automation and its impact on the relationship between work and leisure.

In chapter three, I discuss the emergence of rock and roll music during the period of wildcat strikes and labor strife in America, beginning with a discussion of Louis Jordan’s influence on urban jump blues in the early 1940s. I consider the cultural significance of Jordan’s music for the American working class and his keen sensitivity to the pressing labor issues of the day. I make the case that rock and roll was, and to some extent still is, an expression of working class pretensions that emerged in the forties. Included in this chapter is a discussion of the end of the swing era in jazz music and the bifurcation of swing music into bebop on the one hand, and rhythm and blues, or “jump blues” on the other. I follow the development of rhythm and blues from Louis Jordan, through Wynonie Harris, Amos Milburn to the early years of rock and roll music, where I focus on Chuck Berry, and Little Richard. The other main influence on rock and roll besides rhythm and blues was “hillbilly,” or country music, especially Western Swing. I discuss the *Sun Records* artists who were influenced by the Western Swing music of Bob Wills and the hillbilly music of Hank Williams. The common thread that runs through all the music and musicians I discuss is working class pretensions, especially the desire for less work and more pay. In this chapter I also discuss novel developments of recording technologies, the invention of the electric guitar and the emergence of a record culture and the significance of rock and roll records for working class youth culture in the 1950s. I end the chapter with a consideration of the cultural significance of rock and roll, including a discussion of the music's impact on race relations in the United States as well as its immanent connection to labor issues in post WW2 America. I discuss the structural changes in the recording industry that begin with the recording of rock and roll music by the independent record labels at the end of the 1950s. I also consider the development of a record aesthetic in rock and roll culture and the widespread use of records as learning tools for aspiring young rockers. I end the chapter with a discussion of the working class content of rock and roll music, namely the affirmation of leisure time and the resistance to the drudgery of factory life in postwar America, as a way to illustrate how rock and roll is a form is of its content, to borrow a phrase from Hegel. The sound of rock and roll is a product of the "noise" first produced by the incredible energy of the wildcat strike movement of rank and file workers in the forties.

In chapter four, I discuss the reaction of jazz musicians to the growing popularity of rhythm and blues and rock and roll music. Here I show how professional jazz musicians, all of whom were members of the musicians' union, reacted negatively to rock and roll and condemned the music on aesthetic grounds. Both jazz musicians who made their fortunes in swing music, like Paul Whiteman, and bebop jazz musicians like Dizzie

Gillespie were equally harsh in their criticism of rhythm and blues and rock and roll. I consider the irony of their criticism, since jazz music was subjected to the same kind of intolerance a few decades prior to the controversy generated by rock and roll. I also discuss the overall controversy of, and backlash against, rock and roll music in American society at large, including racist claims that rock and roll was "jungle" music that "lowered" white people to the level of black people, ultra-conservative claims that rock and roll was a communist plot, and "liberal" claims that rock and roll promoted juvenile delinquency. I end this chapter with a discussion of the Payola scandal of 1958 and the attempt by cultural conservatives within the record industry to stamp out rock and roll, and a discussion of the musicians' union's involvement in the Cold War culture, including numerous appearances before Congress testifying to the relevance of culture in the Cold War against the Soviet Union. Here, under president Herman Kenin, the AFM took the high road arguing that the U.S. needed a cultural front in the Cold War against the Soviets, and this could be achieved through exporting the "best" music from America. The hearings before Congress also involved speculation that the American exportation of rock and roll music was damaging the reputation of the U.S. around the world, and therefore posing a 'threat' to America's ability to win the Cold War.

I open chapter five with a discussion of the AFM's attempt to ban the Beatles from touring the United States in 1964, which was the beginning of the British invasion of rock bands. I include a detailed discussion of the Kenin's attempt to ban the Beatles from touring the States in 1964, as well as the banning of the Kinks two years later. The mid 1960s were the pinnacle of conflict between the musicians' union and rock and roll, and I discuss this conflict within the larger social context of the 1960s era of protest during the Civil Rights movement as well as the emerging counter culture. Here I consider how the labor movement in general, and the musicians' union in particular, had alienated itself from the youth culture of the 1960s. The Beatles were able to tour in 1964 after appeasing the AFM, but their status as icons of the counterculture after the release of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club* band, kept them at odds with the old guard of the musicians' union as well as with the leadership of the AFL-CIO, who believed that rock and roll was a disease of sorts, since it was the product *and* agent of drug culture during the sixties.

The final chapter looks at how rock and roll restructured the music recording industry and the implications of structural changes for the AFM. I provide a detailed analysis of the outsourcing of production that begins with rock and roll. I end the chapter with an argument for the centrality of cultural issues in any adequate assessment and analysis of the past and future of the American labor movement.

While the focus of this dissertation is on the years between 1940 and 1970, in some ways, the story begins at the turn of the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER ONE:

WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON?
THE MUSICIANS' UNION AND THEIR INTERVENTION ON MATTERS OF TASTE, OR THE PROBLEM OF RAGTIME MUSIC

"I'm not one of those highbrows. I'm average Joe to you."
-- Louis Jordan

When the American Federation of Musicians held its fifth annual convention in Denver in 1901, the union was riding the wave of an expanding membership and an expanding economy, taking full advantage of the newly emerging leisure industries in the United States. The future looked good for professional musicians, especially union musicians. On the one hand, they had recently overcome a bitter struggle that split their rank and file over the issue of whether or not to join the American Federation of Labor (the umbrella group for craft unions in the U.S.), by obtaining and accepting an official charter from AFL president Samuel Gompers in 1896 to form a new musicians' union, the American Federation of Musicians and disband the previous union, the National League of Musicians (NLM), which was formed 10 years earlier.

On the other hand, the national economy had recovered from the panic of 1896, and the combination of an expanding economy based on manufacturing with the labor movement's epic struggle for more leisure time and less work, had conspired to create a new class of American consumers looking for places to relax, spend their money and be entertained. Union musicians took full advantage of the tight labor market created by the emergent leisure industries, finding jobs in vaudeville theaters, cabaret clubs, picnics, weddings, hotels, restaurants, opera houses, symphony halls and in a little more than a decade, silent movie houses. Many other musicians continued to find good work in traveling minstrel shows and marching bands, venues that had existed since the Jacksonian era in America. Already by 1901, membership in the AFM had swelled to more than 10,000 and the union anticipated more members in the years to come as the economy continued to grow[33]. By the roaring 1920s, the union's membership would approach 100,000 and the AFM would sprout locals in every corner of the country. The first two decades of the 20th century were perhaps the best years in the history of the musicians' union in terms of tight labor markets for musicians.

In spite of all the good news about union solidarity, jobs and the economy, the president of the American Federation of Musicians, Joseph Weber, warned the delegates at the 1901 convention not to become complacent, because there was a "problem" lurking on the horizon, which had to do with the American working class' newfound ability to enjoy leisure time. While AFM officials were upbeat about the tight labor market related to the new spending power of the middle and working class consumers in America, they were nonetheless concerned about the musical tastes of the newly emerging "mass" consumer. A novel kind of popular music was making its way into the still mostly working class leisure spaces in America and it set of the alarm bells among the leadership of the AFM. The music was called "ragtime," and according to president Weber, it represented a threat to the union, since none of its members were playing it or knew very much about it, except for the fact that people in America seemed to be crazy about it.

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[33] See Leiter, *Musicians and Petrillo*.

Ragtime was first popularized by the publication and performances of songs written by Scott Joplin (1868-1917), including “Maple Leaf Rag,” and “The Entertainer.” Joplin’s innovation in music involved the combination of European classical music with African harmonies and rhythms. It was the latter aspects of ragtime that posed a threat to the musicians’ union, since most union members were not familiar with either syncopation or African harmonies. The “ragtime problem” was framed by Weber as a threat to not only the union, but to society at large, and under the lead of Weber, the union would take steps to “protect” American society from ragtime music. The 1901 convention was a key event in the history of the musicians’ union because it was there that Ragtime’s potential *economic* threat to the members of the musicians’ union was coded – perhaps unconsciously - as a *cultural* menace to society at large. The coding of the “Other’s” music as a cultural menace would become a mantra for certain factions in the musicians’ union in the 20th century, especially concerning the question of jazz in the 1920s and rock and roll in the 1950s and 60s[34]. Culture, then, became a site for struggle and a means by which the leadership of the musicians’ union sought to maneuver itself into a position of power in American society in general and the music industry in particular.

Ragtime music took the leadership of the musicians’ union by surprise because it was developed outside the purview of the union by African American itinerant pianists who worked for traveling minstrel shows in the post-bellum South and by black - and in some rare cases white - pianists whose job it was to create “atmosphere” in the working class bawdy houses in the South and Midwest near the turn of the century. The most famous of the pianists, was, of course, Scott Joplin. Joplin, who was born in Texas and lived most of his life in St. Louis, spent the early part of his career as an itinerant pianist playing in brothels and saloons all over the Midwest. The AFM, partly by choice, had no foothold in either of the social spaces where ragtime emerged. There was a local of the AFM in St. Louis, but in the South the AFM had a very weak presence especially in venues like rural working class bawdy houses. While it is true that the labor movement as a whole has had little success organizing in the South due to the region's extreme hostility to labor unions, in the case of the musicians' union there was very little effort made to organize Southern musicians in the first place, especially rural working class Southern musicians black and white[35]. In addition, the active members in the musicians' union have historically been located in the urban areas of the North and West, which are the media centers of the country. Still, regional differences have as much to do with culture as they do with structural factors of the industry and economy. The reason for the lack of interest in the South on the part of the musicians' union is primarily a matter of culture. For union musicians, most of whom were trained in the "classical" European conventions, ragtime music seemed like an anomaly or worse, a degraded art form. The peculiar technical aspects of ragtime, which involved syncopation and flattened sevenths was not understood by most union musicians, academic musicians nor "mainstream" society at large in 1901. The style and technique ragtime and early jazz was so Other to bourgeois white America at the beginning to the 20th century, that jazz remained "noise" until the end of the 1920s, when mainstream America finally developed an ear for the "new" music. Ragtime and early jazz was also alien to most musicians in the union, especially white musicians in the North. The strangeness of ragtime was interpreted by the AFM as a cultural threat to American society, and the union's public denunciation of ragtime music by President Weber set a precedent for union policy in the future. The faction in the union's leadership led by Weber decided that steps had to be taken to rid America of "bad" – code for Southern working class, black and white - music. Weber and his followers at the convention cautioned union members against playing ragtime, and Weber announced that:

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[34] By coded, I don’t mean to suggest that there was a conscious conspiracy against ragtime, but rather that culture operates as a kind of political *un*conscious and that culture relates to material or economic phenomena in a dialectical manner, where in some cases cultural acts as an independent variable in the structuring of economic relations. In other words, because culture operates in relative independence of economic relations, the musicians’ union acted against its own economic interests. It would have been in the economic interests of the union to organize ragtime musicians, but it chose to marginalize them instead. I discuss this issue at length in the case of rock and roll.

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[35] For perhaps the best analysis of why the labor movement has failed in the South see Alan Draper's book, *Conflict of Interests: Organized Labor and the Civil Rights Movement in the South*, *1954-1968* (ILR Press, Ithaca, New York), and Barbara Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Failure of the CIO*, (Temple University Press, 1988).

> "The musicians' union know's what is good [music], and if the people don't, we will have to teach them."[36]

The 1901 convention thus codified the union's decision to anoint itself a member of the elite club of gatekeepers in America whose job it was to help the "masses" make proper decisions in matters of musical taste and consumption. After 1901, it would become part of the AFM's policy to try and influence the aesthetic choices made by American consumers of popular culture in the 20th century through interventions in the media and public appearances before Congress[37]. The ragtime problem eventually became the jazz problem – and to a lesser extent similar issues were raised with the "blues problem" - in the 1920s, and while the jazz problem within the union would be "resolved" in about a decade, the issue of cultural menace and its expression in music would return with rock and roll in the 1950s and 1960s.

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[36] *Official Proceedings*, 1901

[37] These included many appearances before Congress on matters of culture including federally funded programs for the arts in the United States.

The recurring "problem" of cultural menace and its musical expression and the AFM's attitude toward such "controversial" music usually paralleled elitist cultural attitudes in the society at large. In 1901, the leadership of the musicians' union was hardly alone in their public denouncement of ragtime music and early jazz music. On the contrary, the union was part of a larger cultural backlash against ragtime and jazz more generally in America that lasted well into the 1920s, a backlash that included politicians, educators, church leaders and academic musicians. For those who saw themselves as the upholders of traditional values in America, ragtime music and later jazz music generally, seemed a threat to Western civilization itself. The music represented something threatening that went well beyond the particular conventions or techniques involved in playing the music itself. It was thought that jazz music had the capacity to put a spell on its listener, and tempt them toward unsavory activities that were sinful in the eyes of many. In 1911, Baptist clergyman from New York named Dr. John Stranton argued that jazz "is part of a lawless spirit…endangering our civilization in its general revolt against authority and established order[38]." It was thought that jazz might bring down society – through its assault on morality - because it appealed to the "savage" elements in people, which was a code word for "black," since the issue of jazz and the decline of Western civilization was primarily an issue about racial mixing between whites and blacks. In other cases, "savage" connoted "Low" culture in general and could apply equally to rural working class whites as well; indeed such was the case with "hillbilly" music from the Appalachian region – West Virginia and eastern Kentucky - which was labeled "white trash" music by the cultural establishment in America. We now refer to hillbilly music as "country blues," and ironically the early recordings of Appalachian hillbilly music, including the recordings of the singer/songwriter-banjo player Doc Boggs in the 1920s, are now considered important cultural documents in American history thanks mostly to the efforts of people like Alan Lomax who almost single handedly rescued these important cultural figures from the dustbin of history. Lomax traveled the countryside with his father in the 1930s capturing American folk music on record, "discovering" icons of American folk including perhaps most famously, bluesman Huddie Ledbetter known popularly as Lead Belly. All of this folk music was outside the purview of the musicians' union.

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[38] *New York Times*, May 7, 1922 p 15.

Famous rank and file members of the musicians' union joined President Weber and mainstream critics in the attacks on ragtime and early jazz, including the popular bandleader John Philip Sousa whose marching band was one of the first successful groups of recording artists in the early years of music recording. Sousa made a name for himself as the bandleader of the U.S. Marines marching band, and when he left the military in 1875 for civilian commercial work, he developed a successful career as a composer and conductor. His most famous compositions were "Stars and Stripes Forever," and "The Liberty Bell," which many comedy fans know today as the theme song from the introduction to "Monty Python's Flying Circus" television show. In 1892 Columbia records, the oldest record label still in business, offered Sousa a lucrative recording contract and he subsequently became one of the first "star" recording artists in America.

In the early years of music recording, tunes were recorded acoustically onto tinfoil cylinders. Emile Berliner, the German engineer, developed flat discs and his discs eventually became the standard in the recording industry, displacing Edison's discs in the late 1890s. The earliest "record" players were powered by a hand crank, and they were referred to as "talking machines," the name originally coined by Edison, since Edison himself thought that recording technology would be used primarily for dictation. He had no clue that music recording would become such a huge, lucrative industry. Sousa's earliest recordings on cylinders, which sold for two dollars a pop, were among the first mass produced recordings in America and he enjoyed enormous success as a recording artist until his popularity was challenged by recordings of ragtime music beginning in 1906. Perhaps Sousa perceived an economic threat in the popularity of ragtime and early jazz music, but nonetheless, the issue was framed by Sousa as a cultural problem. Sousa was among those in the musicians' union that believed jazz was the music of "savages." In Sousa's words, jazz music "employs *primitive* rhythms which excite the *basic* human instincts" (emphasis mine). Other established figures in the musicians' union that condemned ragtime included the concert pianist Ashley Pettis who claimed that, "jazz is nothing more or less than the distortion of every esthetic principle[39]."

Ironically, it was the United States Marine Band, the very band that Sousa himself once led, that made the first recording of a ragtime tune, Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag," on October 15th 1906 for the Victrola Talking Machine Company, which was Columbia's main competition since by 1906 Edison's recording company was already in the red. Ragtime burst onto the music scene with the popular tunes written by Scott Joplin, especially "Maple Leaf Rag," and the "Entertainer." Although Joplin himself was never –unfortunately – offered a recording contract by any of the three major record companies of the time, his songs were smash hits for publishers of sheet music and his tunes were recorded many times over by other recording artists including Vess Ossman, a white banjo performer who recorded his own version of "Maple Leaf Rag" in 1907 for Columbia. The cylinders sold for the quite affordable price of 25 cents, much less than the two-dollar price of Sousa's first recordings in 1892. The recordings of Joplin's tunes by white recording artists like the U.S. Marines Band and Vess Ossman were the earliest introductions of black music to a "mass" white audience, and these recordings also created division among union musicians over the issue of ragtime and early jazz. Many rank and file members in the AFM disagreed with President Weber's criticisms of ragtime and early jazz and they refused to follow Weber's orders not to play and record the music. There was money to be made in performing and recording ragtime and early jazz, and many union musicians were willing to alienate themselves from the union and join the jazz craze. The next smash hit recording of early jazz music was the recording of what is sometimes referred to as the first jazz record, "Livery Stable Blues," in 1917, by the all white Original Dixieland Jass Band from New Orleans.

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[39] *Ibid.,* November 14, 1924, p. 16.

With the recordings of Vess Ossman, the Original Dixieland Jass Band, and the U.S. Marines Band, the precedent was also set for white recording artists to reap the financial rewards from black music. Black recording artists have consistently been exploited the recording industry, but even in the earliest days of recording black musicians were able to unionize and fight for their rights as performers and recording artists. The first African-American band leader to secure a recording contract was James Reese Europe who organized the Chef Club, which was one of the earliest unions of black musicians. In 1914 the Victor record label, which was later bought by the Radio Corporation of America (RCA), signed Europe’s band, the Syncopated Society Orchestra, to a recording contract, the first ever for black recording artists. It wasn’t until after the Great War, that more black musicians received recording contracts. Indeed the 1920s were break out years for black recording artists, including Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Louie Armstrong to name a few of the more successful black recording artists. Still, these recording artists faced many problems in the music industry having to do with racism and class discrimination.

There were two groups who opposed ragtime and early jazz music. The first included community leaders like politicians, clergy officials, business leaders and educators. The second group included academic and professional musicians, including the musicians’ union. Of course there was substantial overlap between the concerns of both groups, but the first group was concerned with upholding Victorian middle class values, while the second was concerned with protecting the cultural value and “superiority” of European music. Each group could lean on the other for moral support. For instance, it was widely held that ragtime music encouraged debauchery because it had an appeal to what was the most base in human beings: namely desire, especially sexual desire. In fact it was thought that ragtime literally possessed its listener, seducing them into uncontrollable excessive bodily convulsions, which was supposedly evident in the dancing styles that accompanied ragtime. By 1911, dancing to jazz music was all the rage, and for conservative critics, dancing to jazz represented a decline in cultural values, since it was thought to mimic sexual intercourse. Ragtime and “jazz” music more generally, was certainly about having a good time, no one would deny that, enthusiast and detractor alike. What was at issue was whether it represented a threat to social order, the decline of Western civilization and a reversal in musical “progress.” Ragtime music, which is characterized by African harmonies, poly-rhythms, improvisation, flattened seventh notes (blue notes) and syncopation represented a serious departure from the more melodic, formally rigid, standardized rhythmic and notational conventions of European music, both symphonic and marching band styles, conventions that were more familiar to the majority of white members of the AFM.

Ragtime and later jazz music was “Other” to the white members of AFM because ragtime rhythms were based on syncopation, which emphasizes the bass notes on the second and fourth beat of a four beat rhythm, unlike the standard European emphasis on the one and the three. Syncopated rhythms can also put accents half way between the beats and in all kinds of unexpected places. Syncopation combined with the improvisational character of the new music made it difficult to score, or (re)present graphically by notation on sheet music, which was, of course the European way of doing things. Ragtime also borrowed the practice of “flattening” the seventh note in a scale, a style borrowed from blues music. The flattened seventh – or in other cases thirds and fifths - is called “blueing” or in some cases “bending” the notes in a scale. Blues was still at this time, largely unknown in the musicians’ union, because most rank and file members of the AFM under the watch of president Weber were trained in European conventions of symphonic music or marching bands. According to Weber, ragtime music represented a “debasement” of musical taste among the masses, black and white because ragtime strayed from the traditional (bourgeois) conventions and definitions of “good” music that was handed down – and eventually mystified by the method of formalism in academic musicology programs in American universities – by the masters of the classical tradition. The leadership of the musicians' union also supported the academic view that Western music represented the highest stage in the development of music and that the practice of classical Western music captured certain principles that expressed the essence of musical nature. Paul Hindemeth articulated this attitude most famously in the early 1930s:

> The teacher will find in this book, basic principles of composition derived from the *natural* characteristics of tones, and consequently *valid for all periods*. To the harmony and counterpoint he has already learned – which have been purely studies in the history of style – he must now add a new technique, which proceeding from the firm foundation of the *laws of nature*, will enable him to make expeditions into domains of composition which have not hitherto been open to orderly penetration[40]. [emphasis mine]

Hindemeth's view of the material of music as "natural" as well as his belief that certain "principles" of music could be discovered that proved to be a universal foundation or essence of music – "valid for all periods" – and the belief that certain techniques of composition and performance of music obeyed "laws" in the same way that nature supposedly obeys laws, was a particularly pervasive ideology that captured most academic and professional musicians in both Europe and the United States during the first few decades of the twentieth century, including many in the musicians' union. Anything that strayed from the laws described by Hindemeth's principles – which were, of course, not the laws of musical nature, but rather the *particular conventions* of the European bourgeoisie – was considered to be impure and lacking in value. As in all ideology, certain conventions of a particular time period, conventions which are immanent to and which emerge within the definite social relations of production in that society are “reified” in discourse, in this case musical discourse. Rather than grasp the historical and particular aspects of music material, ideology ossifies and reifies particular conventions and “Others” musical conventions that don’t fit the mold. It is perhaps ironic that Hindemeth’s approach was an attempt to incorporate the principles of Newton’s *Principia* into the theory and practice of music during the same era that quantum mechanics was challenging Newton’s system in theoretical physics. Just as quantum mechanics would alter the paradigm in theoretical physics between the world wars, jazz music would forever change the theory and practice of music in the West. During the first few decades of the 20th century in America, jazz music posed a serious problem for academic and professional musicians who remained trapped within the dominant ideology of music discourse, since jazz broke the mold in fundamental ways. But once jazz could no longer be marginalized, the task at hand for academic and professional musicians was to find ways to force jazz fit the mold, but before such a project could be undertaken by professional musicians, ragtime had to overcome the vitriolic attacks by the various non-musical interests in society at large.

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[40] Hindemeth's quote appears in Max Paddison's book on Adorno, *Adorno's Aesthetic of Music* (page 67).

The fact that ragtime was so popular made it seem threatening to people who may have been “peripheral” gatekeepers of American culture. Politicians, religious leaders and other critics were outspoken enemies of ragtime and jazz music. Even physicians got into the fray. Dr. E. Elliot Rawlings from New York claimed “jazz music causes drunkenness…[it sends] a continuous whirl of impressionable stimulations to the brain, producing thoughts and imaginations, which overpower the will. Reason and reflection are lost and the actions of the persons are directed by the stronger animal passions[41].” Other physicians claimed that ragtime caused irritations of the skin. The real threat, of course, was that African-Americans created ragtime, and the real issue at hand was race and racial mixing among whites and blacks. Terms like “animal passion” was code for characteristic behavior invented by black people and mimicked by white people once ragtime became popular. The argument about debauchery and decline of moral values was consequently code of another type: racial mixing and the demise of white supremacy on the one hand, and the deconstruction of classical music on the other. Academic musicians weighed in on aesthetic grounds, claiming that the main problem with jazz was that it was formless. The Princeton professor, Dr. Henry Van Dyke said, “As I understand it [jazz], it is not music at all.” Fortunately, the emerging “mass” consumer paid no attention to the Ivy League snobs like Dr. Van Dyke. Jazz continued to grow in popularity and racial mixing grew as well, although mostly in out of the way places in the margins of urban spaces. It wasn’t until rock and roll that racial mixing took place more openly.

Like most of the AFL craft unions of the time, “white” men controlled the AFM bureaucracy, whereas ragtime music was a peculiarly black American cultural expression. Most craft unions at the turn of the century barred blacks from becoming members, because African American workers – along with Chinese workers in the West and other racial and ethnic “minority” groups in other parts of the country - were viewed as a threat, as competition for scarce jobs, a distorted and ultimately self-destructive perspective that was first produced in the climate of fear and confusion that followed the dismal failure of Reconstruction in the South three decades earlier. The failure of

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[41] *New York Times*, October 7, 1928.

Reconstruction bound together, in very complicated ways, the problems of race and class in America.

In some extreme cases, especially in the South and in the West, rank and file members in union locals led the assault in some of the most notorious and bloody race riots in the history of the United States, including the St. Louis riots of 1917, the Tulsa riots of 1921 and the Detroit riots of 1943, to name a few[42]. The American Federation of Musicians and its locals never participated in such atrocities. On the contrary, the AFM leadership allowed small numbers of African Americans to join their union as early as 1896, but still, only through separate charters for "colored" locals[43]. The AFM leadership under Weber and many of the locals would have preferred to keep blacks out of their union altogether, disguising their racism with claims that African American musicians weren't trained properly enough join, because, allegedly, black musicians couldn't read music. Black musicians in addition to rural, ethnic white musicians were labeled "unschooled" by the musicians' union on the basis of the alleged inability to read and reproduce music notation. Indeed, the AFM placed an emphasis on reading music as an essential aspect of their craft. One of the principle bargaining units in the AFM in addition to instrumentalists is the group of musicians who work exclusively as copyists, reproducing and translating musical scores. As a result of the AFM's bias towards musicians who read music, black musicians who played by ear, and emphasized improvisational performance had to fight their way into the AFM, insisting that they exercise their rights to be represented by a union. It wasn't until the 1920s that African American musicians were able to finally join the AFM in relatively large numbers.

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[42] See Michael Roberts, "Race Riots," in *The Encyclopedia of Racism in the United States,* edited by Pyong Gap Min (Greenwood Press, 2005).

[43] Spivey, *The Union and the Black Musician*

President Weber himself was reported to have been against allowing blacks into the AFM all the way to the end of his tenure as president. African American musicians in Chicago pressed the issue as early as 1902, when the established AFM local in the area, local 10, voted to have separate locals in Chicago, one white and one black. The black musicians quickly organized themselves after the local 10 vote, and in 1902 Weber gave them a charter to form a "colored" local in the windy city, local 208. The race "problem" in the Chicago case was a particularly contentious issue, and the policy of racial segregation in the AFM that lasted until 1964 was a key factor in the controversy involving rock and roll, since the marginalization of rock and roll by the union in many ways reflected the long history of the marginalization of black musicians by the union[44]. Eventually the militancy of black musicians paid off, as the AFM was no longer able to keep blacks out of the union due to the rise in popularity of jazz music in America. According to William Everett Samuels, a black musician from Chicago who eventually became Secretary of the "colored" Chicago local, President Weber "was so prejudiced…that he didn't want [black musicians] either, but he couldn't keep them out, so he said 'all right, you can join the AFM but you'll be the colored local.'"[45] The charter for local 208 set a precedent for an official policy of racial segregation in the AFM, and in the next two decades "colored" locals were established in 50 cities, mostly in the North, including Philadelphia, Pittsburg, Cincinnati, and Washington D.C. Black musicians were finally able to make their presence felt in the union, but segregation in the musicians' union lasted until the federal government forced the integration of the union with the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. Thus, the AFM leadership, in lock step with the rest of the craft unions in America, was very much a part of the machinery that perpetuated institutionalized racial segregation in the United States. The two extraordinary exceptions to the official policy of racial segregation in the early days of the musicians' union was the New York local, (now local 802) and ironically, the Boston local (local 9) the first fully integrated locals in the American Federation of Musicians.

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[44] I discuss this in more detail in later chapters.

[45] Quote appears in Kraft, From *Stage to Studio*, page 30.

In part, it may have been that the AFM leadership under President Weber was worried that the popularity of ragtime music posed an economic threat to their "white" members. Although by the turn of the century, the labor market for musicians was tight enough that union members didn't have to compete with each other or with non-members for jobs, and the union certainly had the power and resources to organize and recruit new members if it so chose. The only significant competition for jobs playing music came from military bands, but the US government eventually agreed to AFM demands that military musicians not be used in *commercial* venues where union musicians were available[46]. Thus, while competition for work remained an important subtext in the AFM leadership's discourse on the music of the "Other", the issue of ragtime music ultimately turned on aesthetic judgment and distinction linked to class power, which were often times displaced and expressed through race.

What complicated the issue for the AFM was that the working class, black *and* white was playing and listening, with enthusiasm, to ragtime music, and many union members were refusing to obey Weber's orders not to play it. Ragtime was shaped, in part, by blues music, which had by then already made the cross over to the white working class in the bawdy houses in the South. As a result, ragtime music and its constituents crisscrossed the lines of race and class in America, creating a complicated patchwork of fans, performers and critics. The mixing of performers and audiences in the ragtime scene created controversy on many sides. On the one hand, ragtime was condemned for reasons having to due with race: the African American elements of syncopation, improvisation and poly-rhythms were "Other" to most of middle class white America. On the other hand, ragtime was condemned for reasons having to do with *class*, not race. The emerging black bourgeoisie in America, would repeatedly attempt to strip jazz – beginning with ragtime - of its roots in blues music, since for the black bourgeoisie, blues music was too close to slavery and in order to lift their race up from poverty – both material and cultural - blues music and its culture had to be left behind, buried with slavery[47]. Beginning in the 1920s, there were attempts by musicians like Paul Whiteman – one of the most famous members of the American Federation of Musicians – to force jazz into a classical mold; in other words to force the *content* of jazz into the structure or *form* of classical music. The new combination was called "symphonic jazz." Louis Armstrong gave it the euphemism "sweet jazz." People close to the ground called the good jazz, the "authentic" jazz, "hot" jazz , because "hot" jazz was not watered down or filtered through the classical idiom[48]. Symphonic jazz or sweet jazz, which was the inauthentic form, was played by white band leaders like Whiteman, while hot jazz was composed and conducted by black band leaders like Louis Armstrong, Count Basie and Duke Ellington.

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[46] Kraft, *Stage to Studio*.

The question of the "Other" that was immanent to the problem of ragtime and jazz music in general, was not only about white and black. In fact, the race question in ragtime was over determined by the highbrow/lowbrow cultural divide that transcended the particular racial division between whites and blacks. The highbrow/lowbrow division was, and to some extent still is, largely a class phenomena displaced through race. The backlash against ragtime occurred during the emergence of cultural hierarchy in the United States that coincided with the emergence of a new ruling class in America after the Civil War. The codification of high and low culture at the end of the 19th century was the culmination of a long struggle that first emerged in New England nearly one hundred years earlier during the religious cult movement that became known as the second Great "Awakening."

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[47] See Leroy Jones (Amiri Baraka) *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*.
[48] I discuss this in more detail below.

According to Michael Broyles, the very idea that music could be split between cultivated art and utilitarian entertainment - what he calls elitism and populism - first emerged in Boston at the opening of the 19th century[49]. It was during these years that the binary dualism that set up European classical music as "art," in opposition to all other musical forms, first emerged. Once it was "agreed" that there is a possibility to separate a "cultivated" music from a "vernacular" music, a canon of musical compositions was established as a means to police and enforce that difference. We are familiar with core members of that canon, like Bach, Beethoven, Haydn, Handel and Mozart. Before 1800, however, all music in America was considered entertainment, but during the Second Great "Awakening," art music became separated from mere entertainment, as something to do with moral improvement. The idea that music had positive and negative moral value gained popularity in American culture during the puritanical religious revivalism of the early 1800's, and although the Second Great Awakening was fairly limited to the peculiar irrationalism of New England Protestants, the idea that music could possess a moral value was eventually codified in American culture more generally. For the Puritans, the issue was to eliminate the bacchanalian aspects of music, to remove the "sinful" side of music by getting rid of sexual passions, and bodily pleasure as whole. Since bodily pleasure usually accompanied music as "entertainment" or "fun," the Puritans labored to find a way to develop a music that had nothing to do with the body. Of course, for the Puritans, bodily pleasure was not simply sinful in and of itself. Rather, music as entertainment, or pleasure, is a problem in so far as it gets in the way of the more "serious" aspects of life, like *work*. Work and pleasure go together like oil and water. Indeed, the main threat of music as entertainment, in the eyes of the Puritan leaders of the Second Great Awakening was the threat that it posed to the Calvinist work ethic. After all, how can you create an environment of religious work discipline if people are dancing to music all the time? Eventually the bifurcation of music between art with moral value and entertainment without value became more secular, but the idea that music can either possess or lack value has its origins in America's puritan heritage, and the fundamental duality in American musical culture maintains a kind of mysticism found in religious fetishism. The removal of the body from "serious" or "art" music remains to this day, as "abstract" or "cerebral" music is valued above vernacular forms that celebrate the body. European classical music became associated with the "serious," or mental side of culture, while folk music was associated with the lower regions of the body. The mind/body dualism that is practically unconscious in contemporary music criticism owes its existence to the religious revivalism of the Second Great Awakening. We take that dualism for granted today. It's remarkable what we find when we go looking into the collective unconscious. The problem of the mind/body split would visit the musicians' union in 1896 when rank and file members fought over how to construct their identity between artists who appeal to the “ideal” or mental side of music and workers, who use their hands as manual laborers.

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[49] See Michael Broyles, *Music of the Highest Class: Elitism and Populism in Antebellum Boston* (New Haven Yale University Press 1992)

While I agree with Broyle’s chronology of events that led to the formation of duality in American musical culture, he places too much emphasis on the Puritan heritage, and not enough on the economic base of society. Broyle is correct to argue that the Puritans desire to remove the body from music was framed by the Calvinist work ethic, but why a work ethic in the first place? The Calvinist work ethic at the heart of Puritanism is also inherent to the capitalist mode of production, and contra to Broyle’s Weberian point of view, it would be a mistake to reduce American music, or American capitalist culture in general to an expression of religion. The Calvinist work ethic is not a moral value suspended in the air, so to speak all by itself. On the contrary, the work ethic is embedded in the social relations of production. My reading of the issue is that the main problem is class, and specifically the problem faced by the capitalist class in figuring out an efficient way to exploit workers. That’s were the Calvinist work ethic comes in, as an ideology designed to fold workers into the culture of capitalism, which is best expressed in the religious expression, “idle hands are the devil’s workshop.” If you look at the time period of the Second Great “Awakening,” it corresponds to the transition to capitalism in American, the era that closed the door on the independent yeoman farmer and the master craftsman the centerpiece of the guild system in pre-capitalist manufacturing. It’s no coincidence that the Calvinist work ethic makes it easier for capitalists to extract surplus value from workers. The duality of American musical culture, as I see it, is shaped by and shapes – in a dialectical way – the social relations of production in capitalism. In other words, the fundamental duality in American musical culture has its roots in the Calvinist work ethic, which itself is embedded in the development of capitalism, and as capitalism developed into an industrial, then financial mode of production after the Civil War, the hierarchical duality of music took on a new form, that accompanied novel developments in the split between mental and manual labor in capitalism, as capital wrested control over the shop floor away from skilled workers.

After the Civil War, as capitalism developed into an industrial or factory mode of production, major demographic changes occurred as working people left the farm for the factory. This period has been referred to as the era of "proletarianization" in America, when a large population of workers, separated from the means of production in agriculture, filled the factories of America[50]. The best historical analysis of the codification of the highbrow and lowbrow aesthetics in post-bellum America that corresponds to the epoch of proletarianization is Lawrence Levine's *Highbrow/Lowbrow: the Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. According to Levine - who develops Marx's argument that the ruling ideas in society are the ideas of the ruling class - before the emergence of factory capitalism, there was much more class mixing in public spaces and at cultural events in general[51]. The consumption of art used to be a much more democratic process in America before the creation of the new class system at the close of the 19th century. The demise of the democratic artisan-republican culture of the pre-capitalist manufacturing system after the Jacksonian era, and the miserable failure of Reconstruction helped create the conditions for the new class system in America that also rearranged cultural institutions, including fundamental categories of the conscience collective. By the end of the 19th century, the Northern capitalist class, which included finance capitalists like J.P. Morgan and robber barons like John D. Rockefeller had solidified their dominance in American politics, especially since the Southern mode of production based on slavery and the plantation system was made subordinate to Northern industrial and finance capital after the defeat of the South in the Civil War. The post-bellum years also signaled the end of the independent yeoman farmer and the independent artisan in America, which were the other symbolic challenges to the industrial bourgeoisie in antebellum America[52]. The reorganization of the ruling class and the proletarianization of both the yeoman farmer and independent artisan in the United States, which taken together produced a new class system, involved the reorganization of cultural spaces as well, both physical and symbolic spaces. In urban areas across the United States the new ruling class created separate spaces for the consumption of culture among the different gradations of classes in the new post-bellum capitalist society. Existing opera houses and symphony halls were redesigned specifically for the separation of the proletariat from well to do audiences and new opera houses were built on the other side of town from working class neighborhoods as a means to reproduce the new social relations of production through the creation of spatial relations in the city that physically separated the classes[53]. In addition, operas were no longer performed in English, as a means to discourage common folk from attending. As late as 1850, according to Levine, the opera was part of American popular culture, but by the turn of the century there was an explicit attempt by the super wealthy to purge the opera house of commoners. Levine quotes Thomas Whitney Surette who argued in 1916 that, "'Opera is controlled by a few rich men who think it a part of the life of a great city that there should be an opera house with a fine orchestra, fine scenery, and the greatest singers available. It does not exist for the good of the whole city, but rather for those of plethoric purses. I does not make any attempt to become a sociological force; it does not even dimly see what possibilities it possesses in that direction…[Opera houses] surround themselves with an exotic atmosphere in which the normal person finds difficulty breathing… they are too little related to the [wealthy] community.[54]'" The reorganization of space in the city was a product of the new class system that prevailed at the closing of the western frontier, which was no longer able to serve as the "safety valve," so to speak of democracy. In the rare cases when working class aficionados did attend the Opera on the other side of the tracks, they were seated in the back of the house, as a reminder of their class position in the outside society: Low.

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[50] See David M. Gordon, et al, *Segmented Work, Divided Workers: The Historical Transformation of Labor in the United States* (New York Cambridge University Press 1982).

[51] Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (New York)

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[52] See Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class 1788-1850* (New York Oxford Press 1984)

[53] For an extended analysis of social class and social space, and the use of urban space as a means to reproduce the capitalist social relations of production, see Henri Lefebvre, *The Social Production of Space*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Blackwell, 1991).

Symbolically, the terms "highbrow" and "lowbrow" emerged from categories used in phrenology during the 19th century, and the categories applied equally to working class blacks and whites. In phrenology, the brow or forehead was believed to be a marker of intelligence among the human race, and the "scientific" community agreed that the changing angle or the "slope" found on the human skull was a sign of evolution and progress in intelligence. The bourgeoisie borrowed these categories form phrenology and applied them to matters of cultural taste. "High" brow corresponded to Shakespeare and Beethoven, whereas "low" brow corresponded to trash novels and working class "popular" music, including at that time, jazz music. Since the working class was coded as "low" it was argued that they lacked the intelligence to appreciate the Opera or

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[54] Levine, p 101.

Shakespeare. The so-called “science” of phrenology also justified class separation in society, since it argued that poor people are poor because of lack of intelligence; as a result we still operate in ideological categories that mask structural inequalities in the dogma of meritocracy. The new spaces in American cities that were coded “high” and “low,” at the turn of the century continue to operate on those codes today, and the duality of musical culture reinforces the ideology of meritocracy in capitalist society.

These historical shifts in the development of capitalism, the creation of dualism in musical culture and the failure of Reconstruction provided the social backdrop during the years when the musicians first formed a union. The mind/body dualism that split musical culture in America also split the identity of the musicians’ union between “artists” and “workers,” as they struggled over whether or not to join the AFL in 1896, a struggle that emerged ten years earlier. In 1886 professional musicians from a handful of large cities including New York, Chicago, Boston, St. Louis and Philadelphia formed the National League of Musicians (NLM), which they referred to as an *association* of musicians rather than a union. The musicians of the NLM were relatively successful in their initial organizing drives, and their success did not go unnoticed by other labor leaders. In 1896, after roughly a decade of success organizing numerous craft unions into a single federation of labor unions known as the American Federation of Labor, Samuel Gompers, the president of the AFL, invited the NLM to join the AFL. Almost over night bitter fights broke out inside the NLM over whether or not to join the AFL and the main issue the musicians fought over had to do with their identity. When Gompers invited the National League of Musicians to join the American Federation of Labor, many of the older generation of musicians in the League voted against joining the AFL, arguing that the NLM would debase their members' status by joining a lowly labor organization of "pipe fitters" and "shoe makers" led by a the "dirty hands" of a cigar roller (Gompers background was cigar rolling)[55]. From the point of view of older, well-established musicians who opposed joining with Gompers and the AFL, the NLM was an association of *artists*, not a union of *workers*. The question for the rank and file in the NLM was: were they "workers" or "artists?" Younger musicians in the rank and file who, for the most part, had to make a living by working second jobs outside the fledgling music industry, argued that if musicians were paid a fee for their labor or "craft," then they were *workers* who had the same set of interests as workers in other craft unions and therefore they too, required a union to represent their interests against those of employers. Joining the AFL would improve their bargaining position with their employers. On the other hand, older more financially established musicians, who could make a good living exclusively from their performances, viewed themselves as "artists" and to join a union, especially a union led by a "lowly" cigar roller named Samuel Gompers, would be a debasement of their status and a defilement of their art. From this perspective, musicians had nothing in common with the dirty, gritty blue-collar workers of the American Federation of Labor. The wealthy musicians in the rank and file of the NLM wanted their organization to remain an *association* of "artist*s*" rather than change its identity to a labor union. It was ironic that the wealthy musicians argued that it was incidental whether they got paid – they believed their art was what really mattered, not the paycheck – because they became well off financially precisely because they had a corner on the market for their labor, which is what a union is supposed to do for its members.

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[55] Kraft, *Stage to Studio*.

The rank and file split in the NLM was a bitter one and each side referred to the other with class and status specific insults. The younger musicians who favored joining the AFL referred to their anti-union adversaries in the League as want-to-be royalty or “prince alberts” and “silk hats” because of a fetish among the older, wealthier musicians for dressing in the finest attire which included top hats made of silk. On the other side, the older, established musicians who opposed joining the AFL referred to their younger adversaries as “pipe-fitters,” and “shoe-makers” as a way to suggest that the pro-union musicians were not really musicians, but rather, blue-collar workers pretending to be something they were not, and something they could never become: “good” musicians[56]. There wasn’t much truth to either side’s stereotype of the other, but there was a serious disagreement about how to deal with the dual identity of musicians as artists *and* workers. The identity split in the union mirrored the fundamental duality in American musical culture. The group of musicians that positioned themselves as artists did so *against* the identity of musician as worker, because to be a worker was understood to be a manual labor, whereas “artist” was understood to be on the mental side of the division of labor between mental and manual labor. Artists supposedly transcend the mundane existence of someone who makes a living that is dependent upon their body, because “artists” are concerned with ideals and morality, not utility. In short, they believed that to become a labor union of workers would compromise and demean their artistic integrity and they fought to keep professional musicians out of the AFL.

The struggle over the identity of professional musicians remained an issue throughout the 20th century, although the struggle over whether they were artists or workers was largely displaced onto an argument based upon “skills,” training and taste.

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[56] See Kraft pages 22-25.

Ultimately, the musicians from the NLM who opposed joining a labor union lost the battle to stay out of the AFL, but they brought with them their “anti-worker” cultural elitism that captured union politics and policy throughout most of the history of the AFM prior to 1970, and that point of view framed the rock and roll controversy in the 1950s.

It seems ironic that the cultural elitism, which was produced by the sharp separation of economic classes and the subsequent hegemony of the financial and industrial capitalist class in the U.S. would eventually seep into a labor union, but that’s precisely what happened in the case of the American Federation of Musicians at the turn of the century. Just as in American society at large, within the musicians’ union, “good” music was almost always code for classical or European music, and “serious” or “trained” musician was usually code for a musician who played in the classical European style. According to the discourse of cultural elitism in the AFM, “workers” who weren’t *really* musicians played the Other music, folk music, which was not on the same aesthetic level as the good stuff, like the masterpieces of Bach and Beethoven. This “anti-folk,” or “anti-worker” attitude that carried over from the NLM to the AFM is the root of the cultural elitism that dominated AFM policy concerning the question of rock and roll music roughly half a century later. This has been perhaps the most significant cleavage within the AFM and this question has never been resolved due to layers of displaced conflicts over identity, which include most significantly, race and class. In other words, the cleavage over the distinction between “good” and “bad” forms or styles of music was often times code for racial differences (white/black) and class differences (high/low or classical/folk).

While the professional musicians of the National League of Musicians entered the AFL as the American Federation of Musicians, and officially became a *labor* union, the split in their collective identity between artist and worker was not, therefore, resolved by joining a labor union of workers. Rather, the split in identity between artist/worker was displaced onto another division: the divide between “good” and “bad” music and “trained” and “untrained” musicians. The duality of musical culture that was the basis of constructing the identity of professional musicians as artists not workers, morphed into the elitism that created the divide between a highbrow and lowbrow aesthetic: namely “good” and “bad” music. The musicians who constructed their identity as artists in opposition to “workers” insisted that the AFM maintain high musical standards for its members, while at the same time they argued for a policy that would create a program designed to “educate” the masses about music and teach them to discern the difference between “good” and “bad” music. The so-called “education” of the masses was in reality a means to justify class distinction since it *presupposed* a split between music with value and music that lacked value. Nevertheless a delicate balance was achieved between the two groups that allowed them to become a relatively powerful labor union in the 20th century.

The two sides were able to compromise by coming together under the rubric of “craft,” an identity that was labor, but an identity that also carried over the cultural elitism from the silk hats and prince alberts. The new musicians’ union portrayed itself as a craft union of skilled workers whose “craft” – making “good” music - was their prize possession. Thus, the craft identity of the AFM was able to hold the two sides together, satisfying the competing identities of “silk hats” and “pipe fitters” for about four decades.

Younger musicians were satisfied that they had a union to effectively represent their economic interests and older musicians were satisfied that the “craft” would retain its discriminatory aesthetic and remain an exclusive institution, barring “unskilled” or “untrained” musicians from membership based on tests that gauged a musician’s ability to read music and adhere to the principles of classical music. Craft unionism in general forged its identity in *opposition* to unskilled workers, and the craft mentality of the American Federation was a perfect example of identity created on the basis of exclusion.

Craft unionism is a holdover from the medieval guilds, where members of a guild maintain their economic power through exclusion and restriction. Guild power is maintained by boosting demand for particular services (labor) and the way to boost the demand for your members’ services is to reduce the supply of people who can perform the services that your guild sells. The AFM, like most craft unions in the U.S., was able to restrict membership through the exclusion of “non-whites,” but also through the imposition of tests, which were based on the ability to *read,* as opposed to simply play, music. Not every local forced its members to pass music notation – reading and writing - tests, but by and large the “craft” of the professional musician was based on the skills involved in reading, and in some cases transcribing, music. This practice excluded huge numbers of working class musicians, both black *and* white from membership in the American Federation of Musicians. Working class African American blues musicians, whose music was categorized as “race” music by the recording industry, and ethnic white working class musicians who were labeled “hillbillies” by the industry, were for the most part completely shut of the union, partly because of these tests. Since the AFM had a monopoly on the largest, most lucrative venues for live music in the North, musicians who played blues and country were forced to find work playing smaller venues in the South and in the Midwest, where the AFM and the labor movement as a whole, was very weak. But it wasn't simply the union that excluded these musicians; it was the music industry as a whole that condemned Southern working class music. These conflicts framed the debate around ragtime and jazz music.

These processes are reflected in the words of Dean Smith of the Yale School of Music, in an article he wrote in 1924 tilted "Putting Jazz in Its Place." Although Smith was not specifically addressing the issues of class power and spatial arrangements in the city, you can decipher the code in his argument. In the article Smith says jazz has a proper place among the working class but it should not be allowed to enter the concert hall:

> Any criticism of its [jazz] music or of its composers is academic and uncalled for – provided jazz holds to its original purpose of entertaining people in their times of recreation…the development of art music is separate and distinct from the work of so-called jazz exponents…It is all right in its place – the cabaret and the dance hall – but it should not be allowed to invade the sacred precinct of our concert halls[57].

The distinction between "art" and "entertainment" was central to the union's collective identity as the AFM leadership strategically placed itself at the center of the creation of cultural hierarchy in America at the end of the 19th century when they publicly condemned ragtime music. One of the active blocks in the union was the group of musicians who played in the "sacred" concert halls, but a growing proportion of union members were playing in jazz venues. A split in identity occurred as the problem for the AFM was that its members played in both the concert halls of art music and in the cabarets of “low” music. This created an inevitable conflict between the rank and file playing in jazz venues and the established leadership of the bureaucracy in the union who represented classical music and marching bands.

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[57] *New York Times*, November 14, 1924, p. 17.

Jazz music would, however, eventually move up the cultural ladder from lowbrow to highbrow music between the 1920s and 1940s. There are two main reasons why jazz moved up the hierarchical classification of American music. First, in spite of all the attempts by conservative critics to discredit jazz music, the public continued to by jazz records in record numbers. The major record labels were making big bucks of the sale of jazz records and it was in their interests to challenge the conservative claims that jazz music was trash. One way to make jazz less controversial for the major record labels, was to have white artists record cover versions of black tunes. Also, by the 1920s, Tin Pan Alley composers like Gershwin and Berlin had developed a “whiter” form of jazz that was less controversial for the owners of record labels, who recorded it in large volumes.

Second, and perhaps most obvious, is that it became increasingly difficult to dismiss jazz for aesthetic reasons, with either the technical criteria of instrumental performance or the criteria of compositional sophistication. Critics found it more difficult to condemn jazz as the music made its way across the pond, where European composers spoke approvingly of the music. As early as 1895 when Dvorak visited the U.S., ragtime jazz received a significant cultural boost by the European master. Dvorak was said to be fascinated with what he called the “plantation melodies” of the American

South and he advised American composers to take jazz seriously as America's cultural expression. Dvorak admitted that his *New World Symphony* was largely inspired by the music he heard in the American South when he claimed that:

> These beautiful and varied themes are the product of the soil. They are the folk songs of America, and your composers must turn to them. In the Negro melodies of America I discover all that is needed for a great and noble school of music[58].

Dvorak sparked considerable controversy with these words, and he was immediately challenged by the American critic Edward MacDowell who reportedly laughed at Dvorak's comments and dismissed everything uttered by "the bohemian Dvorak," as if "bohemianism" was sufficient enough of a caricature to dismiss the comments of the great European composer. MacDowell argued that "Negro music" had nothing to do with "Americanism in art[59]." As a result of the attitude of American composers and critics like MacDowell it would be two decades before American composers took Dvorak's advice, but nonetheless the approval of jazz by European composer's with the stature of a Dvorak made it more difficult to continue the barrage against jazz and the marginalization of African American music in general . Other important classical composers from Europe who were influenced by jazz included Debussy, Stravinsky and Milhaud. All of these composers included jazz elements into their compositions. Honest music critics in America told a different story than conservative critics like MacDowell about the reception of ragtime music by the musical establishment in the U.S. Critics like Ruper Huges challenged MacDowell's racist comments. Hughes was one of the first academically trained music critics in America who considered ragtime a legitimate aesthetic, and he argued in 1899 that:

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[58] Dvorak's quote appears in Gilbert Chase's *America's Music* (New York, 1955) p 391.
[59] *Ibid.* p 390.

> It [ragtime] was so strangely difficult to master. It required a new technique in rhythm and fingering, and I saw many a *snooty conservatory-trained* expert get his fingers all tangled up as he tried to do what thousands of Negroes and their [white] imitators did naturally and with ease[60]. (emphasis mine)

These were perhaps the real reasons why many academic and professional musicians opposed the spread of ragtime music. Huges was one of the rare critics who told the truth about ragtime and early jazz: it was good music, and more importantly it was difficult for "snooty conservatory-trained experts" to understand, let alone perform. Therefore, those "experts" who were unable to perform it, besmirched jazz in the name of aesthetic virtue. According to Hughes, ragtime music had "two classes of enemies: the green-eyed, blue-goggled fogy who sees all in popular music a diminution of the attention due Bach's works; and the most modern scholar who thinks he has dismissed the whole musical activity of the Negro by calling it reminiscence of Scottish music[61]." It is interesting that Hughes mentions "Scottish" music as equally "bad" to that of "Negro" music in the eyes of academically trained musicians in America, revealing the connection of class and race in the highbrow dismissal of American folk music in general.

Black members of the musicians' union who were playing jazz against Weber's wishes, worried that the white hysteria, which developed around racial mixing in jazz venues might result in violence against black musicians. Buster Bailey, a black clarinetist recalled that when he performed in clubs white people were afraid "we'd go after their women." The theme of black men preying on white women would emerge again with the question concerning rock and roll.

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[60] Quoted in Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis, *They All Played Ragtime* (New York, 1950) p 271.
[61] *Ibid.*

Perhaps more than any other American composer and bandleader it was Paul Whiteman who legitimated jazz in the eyes of both white America in general and academically trained musicians in America. Whiteman was also a member of the musicians' union and his work led the AFM to eventually accept jazz music. Whiteman, whose name carries a significant sense of irony, was one of the first composers to attempt to create a "symphonic" form of jazz music as a way to lift jazz up from its "savage" origins. Whiteman was among those who believed jazz music had potential, but that it was still in an "undeveloped" form. Whiteman felt that if he could find a way to "refine" jazz then he could perform it in the great concert halls of America. The issue for Whiteman was how to introduce more melody into jazz and remove the "offensive" elements of jazz like the "growling" horns and a the "savage" rhythms. Whiteman liked the novelty of jazz and he thought it was an exciting new music, but it needed to be filtered through classical conventions. In general, whites in America were both attracted to and repulsed by jazz music. Perhaps at an unconscious level there exists a simultaneous desire for and a fear of the Other. Whiteman seems to say as much in his book on jazz music, although perhaps unconciously. Commenting on jazz Whiteman says,

> In America, jazz is at once a revolt and a release. Through it, we get back to a simple, to a savage, if you like, joy in being alive. While we are dancing or singing

> or even listening to jazz, all the artificial restraints are gone. We are rhythmic, we are emotional, we are natural[62].

Whiteman was sincere – if racist – in his appreciation of jazz and he had a genuine desire to help mainstream America develop a taste for it. The supposedly "savage" elements of jazz were what attracted and disgusted white listeners. Thus, the goal of symphonic jazz was to make jazz music palatable to whites. Whiteman became a star almost immediately. Writing for the *New York Times*, Helen Lowry claimed that finally conductors like Whiteman were "putting the music into jazz. "Jazz," writes Lowry, "now is arranged and written as for a symphony-each player must be a trained musician, who would probably be a member of a symphony orchestra, save for that God-given trick of being a master of syncopation…Each player does the part allotted to him – and no more[63]." In short, according to mainstream critics, with the arrival of Whiteman, jazz finally emerged from the noise and became music. The critic Sigmund Spaeth may have been the first to coin the term "sweet" jazz, although Louis Armstrong frequently used the term to describe white jazz. According to Spaeth, the refined symphonic jazz "produced a 'sweet' jazz [with] soft, dreamy, subtly exotic effects, often presenting real beauty of tonal coloring. The old raucous noises are now almost forgotten[64]." For critics like Lowry and Spaeth, symphonic jazz made it safe to consume the music of the Other. The key turning point in the change in the status of jazz from "jungle" noise to "refined" music was the Whiteman orchestra's performance of George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in

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[62] Paul Whiteman and Mary Margaret McBride, *Jazz* (New York, 1926) p. 155.
[63] Helen Lowry, "Putting the Music Into Jazz," *New York Times*, February 19, 1922 section III p. 8.
[64] Sigmund Spaeth, "Jazz is Not Music," *Forum*, LXXX (August, 1928) p. 271.

Blue" at the Aeolian Hall in New York on February 12, 1924. Explaining his reasons for wanting to put on the "all jazz concert" at Aeolian Hall Whiteman explained,

> My idea for the concert was to show…skeptical people the advance, which had been made in popular music from the day of discordant early jazz to melodious form of the present. I believed that most of them had grown so accustomed to condemning the 'Livery Stable Blues' sort of thing, that they went on flaying modern jazz without realizing that it was different from the crude early attempts…My task was to reveal the change and try to show that jazz had come to stay and deserved recognition[65].

Whiteman took the success and adulations from his Aeolian Hall performance and went into the recording studio to record "Rhapsody in Blue," which had become the signature tune of the Paul Whiteman Orchestra. It was a smash hit for Whiteman, who took his orchestra on the road in 1928, and his Old Gold Special road show was the first show to have a national corporate sponsor. Until the Great Depression, Whiteman's Old Gold Special was the most popular music show on the radio. All the success enjoyed by Whiteman eventually led to his "coronation" as the "King of Jazz." Not only is it ironic that someone named Whiteman became known as the "King of Jazz," but music critics today are in universal agreement that his musical achievements are of little value in retrospect. Compared to Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Count Basie and many other of his contemporaries, Paul Whiteman's musical contributions to the legacy of jazz are quite insignificant. The importance of Whiteman's legacy is his success in making jazz acceptable to the mainstream and breaking down the stigma associated with jazz. Even more ironic is that when rock and roll burst onto the scene in the 1950s, Whiteman was one of the harshest critics of rock and roll and he led the musicians' union's bitter attack on the music. After all the work he had done to lift that stigma on jazz, Whiteman would sink down to the level of reactionary cultural crank regarding rock and roll[66]. Still if it weren't for the Paul Whiteman orchestra's performances of "Rhapsody in Blue," jazz may not have climbed so rapidly up the ladder of cultural hierarchy in America. By the 1930s, in spite of the Great Depression, jazz musicians were doing well for themselves as Swing music became the popular music in America. Radio broadcasts of the Big Bands including the Duke, Count Basie, Chick Webb, Benny Goodman and Woody Herman among others, were wildly popular in America throughout the 1930s. Jazz finally entered the mainstream with Swing music and the new technology of radio broadcasting. In the 1930s, radio was king, since at that time the recording industry had not yet perfected electronic recording technology. Music simply sounded better on radio than on record, and radio was free, which of course made a big difference during the Depression. Record sales, on the other hand, plummeted during the Depression. Radio would dominate recording until after the Second World War. While the jazz problem in the musicians' union was solved by 1930, other kinds of marginal music posed new threats.

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[65] Whiteman and McBride, p. 94.

During the same years that jazz was moving up the cultural ladder in America, clas*s* based attacks on popular music that were once focused on jazz found a new target: ethnic "white" working class music, like the music that was referred to by the recording industry as "hillbilly" or "white trash" music which was based in the Appalachian regions of West Virginia and eastern Kentucky[67]. Just as blues music was disparagingly referred

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[66] I discuss Whiteman's attack on rock and roll in later chapters.

[67] The term "hillbilly" was actually used in the early years of the recording industry to categorize white working class music from Appalachia and the South. The term was changed to "country western" in the

to as “race” music by the music industry trade magazines, ethnic and rural white working class music would also be mocked and dismissed by the establishment of the music industry. In 1926, *Variety* magazine described the musicians of Appalachia as “white trash,” possessing “the intelligence of morons.[68]” It wasn’t until the 1940s that “moron” music, after proving to be a profitable commodity, would receive a name change by the industry when it became “country” and “country blues” music. Nevertheless, working class music was considered “lowbrow” regardless of race by large segments of American upper and middle class consumers, black and white, the corporations that controlled the recording industry *and* (perhaps ironically) the musicians’ union. One can’t help but see some irony in the position of the musicians’ union, which after many years of struggle among its rank and file, had finally established its identity as *labor*, could nonetheless appropriate for itself a thoroughly bourgeois aesthetic regarding its judgment upon the form and content of indigenous American music: blues, folk, and country.

Race (blues) and hillbilly (country) were not the only musical forms condemned by the AFM and the music industry as a whole. Throughout the 20th century, as the tendentious relationship between the working class and the established corporate powers in the culture industry reshaped the cultural landscape of the U.S., certain factions inside of the leadership structure of the AFM, as well as many famous and influential rank and file members white *and* black spoke out against the recurring cultural “menace” of popular (working class) music beginning with the controversy over ragtime and continuing over the years with “hot” jazz, blues, hillbilly, rockabilly, rhythm and blues

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1940s as the record industry began to respond to a growing demand among all kinds of consumers for that music.

[68] See *Variety* magazine, “Hill-Billy Music,” December 29, 1926. For an excellent analysis of the class based discrimination against Appalachian musicians and early country music by the recording industry, see Peterson, *Creating Country Music*.

and rock and roll. In all of these cases, race and class were bound together in complicated contexts, each expressed through the other in contradictory ways[69]. The musicians' union occupied the intersection of all these contradictions in the American music industry.

As I mentioned above, the reason why the musicians' union never officially recognized Southern working class music as a legitimate aesthetic was because professional musicians have never been clear about their *own* identity as far back as the 1880s, the peak years of the proletarianization process and the formation of a new working class in America[70].

The first commercially successful "hillbilly" musician was Jimmy Rodgers (1897-1933), dubbed the "father" of country music. Born in Mississippi and raised in foster homes in Mississippi and Alabama, Rodgers made a living working as a brakeman on the railroads. Through his extensive traveling on the railroad, Rodgers learned how to play the blues from black co-workers. When he eventually settled in the Blue Ridge Mountains in North Carolina Rodgers organized occasional pick up band for informal performances around town. In 1927, Rodgers got wind that Ralph Peer, an executive at RCA/Victor records was in Bristol Tennessee looking to record "indigenous folk talent from Appalachia." Rodgers jumped on the opportunity and made the trip to Bristol to cut a record with Peer. Like most "untrained" working class musicians from the South and from the Appalachian region, Rodgers did not read music, and his singing style, which bended melodies by "flattening" the third note in a measure, in the same manner as the blues, was also peculiarly off meter. The bluesy singing style was the main reason for his appeal among Southern working class audiences. After having success recording with Ralph Peer for RCA/Victor, Rodgers was invited to come and play for live audiences in New York City. The trip was a disaster, however, because the musicians in Rodgers' own band were not allowed to play with Rodgers because they were not members of the musicians' union – they were excluded on the grounds that they didn't read music. New York venues and recording studios, on the other hand, were all union shops. Peer arranged for union musicians to play with Rodgers, but they couldn't find a way to adapt to his out-of-meter singing style and bluesy guitar playing, because they were trained to play straight time. Peer couldn't find a way to fit Rodgers with union musicians, so the tour was cancelled and Rodgers was sent packing[71]. Peer himself like the rest of the industry, actually loathed the music of Jimmy Rodgers and the other hillbillies he recorded for RCA/Victor and Okeh records. Peer was in it solely for the money. The case of Jimmy Rodgers and New York musicians foreshadowed the problem of rock and roll and the AFM in the 1950s.

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[69] There has been much debate over the status of "popular" music in America. Some view "popular" music as folk music refracted – and therefore degraded – through the commodity form. In this perspective "popular" music is seen as inauthentic and therefore lacking in value. The culture industry, in this view, is to blame for the standardization and degradation of "authentic" popular music, which is referred to as "folk" rather than popular. I don't take that view in this dissertation, since for me, the main problem with the musicians' union and working class music, has been the disaster that followed in the wake of the union's attempts to classify music into categories of high and low (good and bad) or authentic/inauthentic. Thus, I will use popular to refer to working class music, unless the discussion turns on the question of the culture industry and the commodification of music.

[70] On the issue of proletarianization and the formation of the working class in America, see *Segmented Work, Divided Workers: The Historical Transformation of Labor in the United States*, by David M. Gordon, Richard Edwards and Michael Reich (Cambridge Press, 1982).

Jazz, however, was no longer an issue for the musicians' union by 1930. As jazz music "evolved" and moved up the ladder of cultural and aesthetic hierarchy, musicians who played jazz joined the AFM in large numbers. Jazz, for reasons discussed on previous pages, morphed from the aesthetic "low" of ragtime in 1901 to the "high" of bebop in the early 1940s[72]. In the early years of jazz, at the turn of the century, the union and American society as a whole didn't accept jazz as a legitimate "art" form. But, by the 1930s, jazz became both a big business and a respectable "art" form because the bourgeoisie in America bank rolled the production and recording of the music and, perhaps more importantly, appropriated the culture and aesthetic of jazz. Racial segregation remained in the AFM, but jazz music was largely accepted by the union by the 1930s; white members were playing it and some of the most prominent rank and file members of the AFM were African Americans, like Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, Coleman Hawkins and Count Basie, to name a few. Nevertheless, serious racial imbalances remained, including the ironic dubbing of Paul *White*man, a very prominent and outspoken "white" member of the AFM, as the "king" of jazz by the music industry. In short, the union accepted jazz, partly because African American musicians had to fight their way into the union and get their piece of the pie, but also because by the end of the 1930s, the AFM had become a *dependent variable* in the new regime of capital accumulation in the American music recording industry, riding the coat tails of the major record labels that were making big bucks from the sale of big band (swing) jazz records, and because jazz was finally recognized for what it was on its own terms: a "sophisticated" music that could go toe to toe, on the grounds of skill and technique, with the "best" of European classical music. By 1930, nobody in the union could claim that jazz musicians lacked "skill," or "sophistication." Regardless, it wasn't until jazz became a profitable commodity, when the major labels decided to record it and distribute it, that the AFM officially recognized it, otherwise the AFM may never have accepted jazz.

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[71] Petersen, *Creating Country Music*.

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[72] Regarding the issue of the history of how jazz became "art," see Deveux, *Birth of Bebop*, Leonard, *Jazz and the White Americans*, Levine, "Jazz and American Culture," Kofsky, *Black Music, White Business* and Lott, *What is This Thing Called Jazz.*

Jazz, and the musicians who played it, made it into the core of the music industry in the late 1930s as the country was coming out of the Great Depression, when the domestic economy was “radically” restructured by the New Deal, which under the leadership of the Roosevelt administration and the corporate establishment, created the conditions for a new “regime” of capital accumulation that emphasized the expansion of consumption (consumer and government) via credit and deficit spending as well as the “cooperation” between labor and capital both on the shop floor and on Capitol Hill. In addition, the music industry, like other industries in the core of the economy, including, the auto, steel and mining industries (to name a few) had adopted a “Fordist” model of production that was characterized by a rationalized system of mass production that included the division of labor along an assembly line and rationalized consumption that involved paying workers “high” wages and the availability of credit to the working and middle classes[73]. This “Fordist” model of mass production and consumption, together with the passage of the National Labor Relations Act (also known as the Wagner Act) in 1935 - which provided the legal mechanisms for the federal government to create a political environment for “cooperation” between labor and capital- completely transformed the capitalist economy in the United States[74]. In short, the years after the Great Depression marked a transition to a new stage of capitalist development in the United States and the global economy.

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[73] The term “Fordism” was first coined by Antonio Gramsci to describe the reorganization of the capitalist economy based on principles first deployed by Henry Ford. Ford’s innovations were the mass assembly line that divided up the labor process on the shop floor, and the “five-dollar” day, a program designed to pay workers a good wage to ensure increased consumer demand. In short, Ford institutionalized the mass production/mass consumption model of economic development that became the standard beginning in the 1920s. What is important for theorists like Gramsci and Michel Aglietta, is that “Fordism” represented the overcoming of the contradictions of capital accumulation that led to the Great Depression and world wide economic crisis. The source of the Depression was a collapse in aggregate demand in the economy. Fordist and New Deal programs were designed to solve the problem of aggregate demand. “Fordism” represented a new “regime” of accumulation or new conditions for renewed economic growth and a new stage of capitalism because for the first time capital considered labor a junior partner in the “planning” of economic growth. For a theoretical investigation of the significance of the concept “Fordism,” see Antonio Gramsci *Prison Notebooks* and for an application of Gramsci’s theory on the music industry, see Michael Roberts, “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag.” I discuss “Fordism” in the recording industry in more detail in the last chapter.

In the music industry, the general pattern of Fordism and New Deal economic policies were applied. As in other segments of the core area of the economy, a few corporations dominated a rationalized system of mass production and consumption in the music recording industry and they along with the assistance of the government, depended on the "cooperation" of a union (in this case the AFM) to create an environment of stable labor relations. Stable and predictable labor relations were a necessary, if not sufficient condition for renewed economic growth in the U.S. in the years after the Great Depression. Union workers in the core of the economy benefited enormously during the "Fordist" years of economic growth that lasted all the way until the early 1970s. In the music industry, the production of jazz took place under new conditions of production in the "Fordist" structure of the recording industry. As was the case with other industries in the *core* of economy, in the music industry a few major record labels together with union musicians in the American Federation of Musicians and composers in ASCAP dominated the recording industry. The production process in music recording was efficiently rationalized according to a plan that involved cooperation between the major record labels and the musicians' union. Outside of the fold of Fordism, blues (race) and country (hillbilly) music remained on the margins of the music industry, and the musicians who played it, remained on the *periphery* of the economy with most non-unionized and "unskilled" workers in other industries. In sum, there are structural reasons that explain the marginalization of particular expressions of working class music in the U.S.

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[74] The New Deal policies were influenced by the ideas of John Maynard Keyenes, whose magnum opus, the *Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*, became general wisdom among the architects of the New Deal. Keynes made the argument that economic collapse is a result of declining "aggregate demand" in the economy. Consequently, he argued that national governments needed to intervene in the economy to create conditions of sustained aggregate demand by investing in infrastructure, maintaining full employement, regulating monetary policy and in certain contexts running deficits.

Of course another reason for the exclusion of race and hillbilly music and musicians from the AFM and the core of the recording industry was regional. What was called race and hillbilly music was based mostly in the South, which was, and in many cases remains, rabidly anti-union. The labor movement in the United States suffered serious losses in the attempt to organize the South, and since the passage of the anti-labor Taft-Hartley Act in 1947 – which includes the "right to work" clause – the South has been more or less written off – with a few exceptions - as a lost cause for union organizing[75]. Some would argue – although I would not – that the AFM would have had little success organizing these musicians, even if they had wanted to make such a move. The union has its most success in the media centers in the North, where the AFM and the labor movement as a whole had become a "junior partner" in the Fordist regime of capital accumulation.

As a result of their regional and structural exclusion, southern black and white working class musicians worked on the margins of the music industry from the 1920s until the early 1950s. For the most part, the major record labels ignored the "race" and "hillbilly" music in the 1920s and 1930s, but there were a few exceptions like the *Okeh* records label – which was bought out by *Columbia* records in the 1930s - managed by Ralph Peer who organized some of the earliest "race" and "hillbilly" recordings like the recording of Mamie Smith's "Crazy Blues" in 1923 and fiddlin' John Carson's "The

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[75] See Barbara Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO*, and Alan Draper, *Conflict of Interests: Organized Labor and the Civil Rights Movement in the South*.

Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane." In 1927, the major label *Brunswick* recorded "Sugar Baby," and "Country Blues," by Dock Boggs. Ironically, in hindsight we now view these recordings by Peer as some of the most important cultural events in American history. Nevertheless, the market remained small for race and hillbilly music until the late 1940s, and music the likes of Dock Boggs was considered garbage at the time when *Brunswick* recorded it. Ralph Peer made a lot of money off the music when he left the *Okeh* label for *RCA/Victor* in 1923, but the Great Depression and the downturn in record sales from 75 to 6 million units effectively wiped out the fledgling recording industry in race and hillbilly music. In part, then, the reason for the marginalization of black and white working class music was largely structural; the major record labels could afford to ignore the music – believing there wasn't enough demand for the music to justify recording it - until technological advances after World War Two allowed smaller "independent" record companies to record race and hillbilly music and make good money doing it.

Regional and structural-economic factors don't, however, tell the whole story of exclusion by and division within the American Federation of Musicians over the issue of working class music. On the contrary, the highbrow bourgeois aesthetic, which bound together race and class, and which was conspicuously present at the inception of the first musicians' union as far back as the mid 1840s, played the key determining factor in the case of the AFM and its exclusionary practices. The roots of what we now consider to be popular (working class) music, particularly rock and roll, the roots of which lie in blues and country, were considered by certain factions in the leadership of the AFM and among high profile rank and file members as illegitimate art forms. It wasn't enough, however, for the AFM to simply marginalize the music of the black and white working class by excluding its performers on the basis of "skills" tests and race. On the contrary, the union actively pursued a strategy to *eliminate* it through a program to establish the union as a major player among the gatekeepers of American culture. So, beginning with the platform at the 1901 convention, the AFM devised a plan to construct a cultural policy toward music and the masses, where the AFM would take it upon itself to "educate" the masses about "good" and "bad" music. The union would seek approval and funding from Congress to pursue its cultural education programs. The strategy of working to direct the cultural tastes of America that was set in 1901 remained a major platform of the AFM especially during the Cold War years of hysteria during McCarythyism and the explosion of rock and roll in the 1950s and the attempt to coerce the Department of Labor to ban the Beatles in 1964.

Of course, not everyone in the union endorsed the union's policy on educating the masses, nor did everyone in the union embrace the highbrow/lowbrow aesthetic divide that did not emerge full blown in America until after the turn of the 19th century[76]. Some members, especially outside of the major media centers in the East, (including New York, Boston and Philadelphia), recognized that all musicians, regardless of what kind of music they played, or what "skills" the possessed, should be organized and included in the AFM. James C. Petrillo, the president of the AFM between 1939 and 1951, was among those who challenged the elitist factions in the union. Petrillo's vision for the AFM was influenced, in part, by the *industrial* unionism model of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) which formed in 1935 and was a major competitor with the AFL for members until the merger of the two umbrella groups in 1955. The CIO had made it a policy of organizing workers across entire industries regardless of skill and craft, a sharp break from the craft union model of the AFL, which organized members along the lines of specific crafts. Under Petrillo, the American Federation of Musicians won one of the most important strikes of the century, the great recording ban of 1942. The victory in the strike of 1942 had important consequences for all workers across all unions, because the terms of the agreement were truly revolutionary. It is to the Petrillo years that we now turn.

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[76] See Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: the Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*.

CHAPTER TWO:

SOLIDARITY FOREVER?

THE MUSICIANS' UNION REACHES ITS PEAK IN POWER

"I'm proud to be a union man."

-- Neil Young

"ALL RECORDING STOPS TODAY!" Those words ran across the front page of *Downbeat* magazine on August 1, 1942. The American Federation of Musicians was officially on strike against the record companies. Session musicians as well as recording artists all across the states walked out of recording studios and stayed out for the better part of a year. The musicians' went on strike in spite of the no-strike pledge made by the AFL and CIO while the U.S. was at war, and they stayed out on strike in spite of numerous pleas made by President Roosevelt that they return to work in the name of "national security." The year 1942 was the pinnacle of AFM militancy and the implications of the musicians' strike spread far and wide across the labor movement. Indeed, the musicians' strike in 1942 was one of the most important events in the history of the American labor movement, including such epoch shifting events as the great sit-down strikes conducted by the auto workers in 1937, the mass strikes among textile workers in the South the same year and the wave of strikes in 1919. The musicians' strike of 1942 ranks up there with all of the most significant strikes in American history, both for the sheer muscle power displayed by the musicians' as well as for the widespread implications for all workers in all industries who were threatened by management's use of mechanization to wrest control of the shop floor from skilled workers on the one hand, and to replace workers altogether on the other hand, as technology progressively reduced the demand for labor in all areas of production.

The main issues for the AFM during the recording ban were the deskilling of labor and the loss of jobs due to technological developments in music recording technology. Specifically, the musicians' union was struggling to find a way to protect its members who were losing jobs as a result of the commercial use of recorded music on radio, in movies and in jukeboxes. Tens of thousands of musicians lost their jobs in vaudeville theatres, silent movie houses and radio stations as a result of the development of sound recording and playback technologies that allowed radio stations to use records instead of live musicians, and "talkie" movies eliminated musicians from movie houses altogether. It's unfortunate the recording ban of 1942 has not attracted more attention from labor historians, because musicians confronted issues that would plague all workers in years to come, namely mechanization, automation and the concomitant loss of jobs. These were the crucial issues for the future of work and labor in America during the decades after the war, and the musicians' union developed one of the most innovative responses to automation that had potential to serve as a model for all unions faced with job loss at the hands of mechanization and automation. The musicians' were able, through the use of labor's greatest weapon, the strike, to get the major record labels, the big companies that dominated the music recording industry, to agree to a royalty system that required record companies to contribute a percentage of the sale of each record to a fund controlled by the union called the Recording and Transcription Fund (RTF), which was later renamed the Musicians' Performance Trust Fund (MPTF) after control of the fund was turned over to an independent agency the operated the fund on behalf of the union and the record labels. The money from the fund was used to pay unemployed or underemployed musicians for public performances of live music that were free to the public. It was a truly innovative achievement for the AFM, because they were able to force management to take responsibility for jobs that were lost due to mechanization, but more important were the cultural implications. The victory in the great recording ban of 1942 had an impact on ideology as much as anything else, because it allowed workers to challenge the dogma of scarcity propagated by capital. In other words, the implication of the agreement that ended the recording ban was that technology does not *only* reduce the demand for labor, but it *also* creates abundance. The side effect of more wealth and abundance created by technology is that corporations can afford to both pay its workers who are on staff *and* take care of workers who formerly worked for them, but were replaced by machines. The massive corporate conglomerates that controlled radio, film, television and records were growing very wealthy from the expansion of the music industry, which meant they could easily afford to pay all musicians, employed and unemployed alike, more for working less. The belief that capital can pay more, in fact *easily* pay more, because scarcity has been conquered by technology, and the transformation of that belief into practice and official policy, is an achievement unmatched in the history of the labor movement. Indeed, the effects that the agreement had upon the *imagination* of workers is as important as any of the material gains, because it inspired, indeed helped to create the conditions for working class pretensions that lasted almost 30 years. Conquering the culture of austerity is the precondition for any material gains made by the labor movement.

Unfortunately for most rank and file musicians in the union, indeed for the labor movement as a whole, the AFM itself would spoil its greatest achievement because of its own peculiar ideology rooted in aesthetic elitism. In short, the working class pretensions that were made possible by the ideological victory over capital in the recording ban *contradicted* the highbrow sensibilities that also occupied the imagination of the leadership and famous rank and file musicians in the union. The conditions - both material and ideological - created by the victory of the 1942 strike would prove to be unsustainable as long as the AFM continued to marginalize, neglect and debase an entire demographic of American musicians, namely rural working class musicians whose musical roots in the blues and hillbilly music were considered "beneath" the union. Ultimately, the union could not have it both ways. They could not simultaneously wage an ideological struggle against capital *and* exclude certain musicians from membership in their union on the basis of ideological categories the created a hierarchy – "us (good) and them (bad)" - between two groups of musicians in the imagination of the union. The ideological contradictions that fractured their identity would haunt them during the decades after the recording ban of 1942.

It's a complicated story that begins a few years before 1942, at the AFM convention of 1937 in Louisville Kentucky, for it was there that rank and file musicians turned up the heat on their leadership in the AFM to due something about hemorrhaging of job losses that followed the use of recorded music.

At the musicians' union's annual convention in 1937, delegates from numerous locals began pressing then President of the AFM, Joseph Weber, to do something more drastic about the problem of recorded music and movies with sound, which by the mid 1930s had cost the union thousands of jobs, most of them at the hands of "talkie" movies. With the widespread use of records following the improvements in the quality of recording processes made possible by electronic recording technology, the AFM was facing its most serious crisis to date. The three main areas of job losses were in movie houses, where movies with sound cost thousands of jobs across the country; radio, where network broadcasts of remotes and the use of records had resulted in the downsizing of staff orchestras at scores of affiliates, and jukeboxes which reduced demand for live music in bars and taverns. Although membership at the New York (local 802) and Los Angeles (local 47) branches was growing as a result of the emerging recording industry that increased demand for session musicians in recording studios, for most locals across the country, membership was down dramatically. According to James Kraft, by 1936, locals like Minneapolis and Atlanta were half the size they were in 1928, and most other locals had membership declines of 20 to 35 percent[77]. Weber himself had estimated that more than 13,000 members of the AFM were on public relief[78]. Robert Leiter calculated that in 1929, for every job opening in a symphony orchestra, more than 20 musicians applied; whereas just three years before, symphony managers struggled to find musicians to fill such positions[79]. The introduction of sound movies accounted for the big change in the supply of labor. Of course the Great Depression had a lot to do with why so many musicians were out of work, but the loss of jobs in movie theatres at the hands of movies with sound pre-dated the Depression by a few years. While Weber seemed to realize the magnitude of the problem he was slow to move toward doing something about it, which enraged many rank file members, and eventually led to his removal from office.

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[77] James P. Kraft, *Stage to Studio*.
[78] *Official Proceedings of the Annual Conventions of the American Federation of Musicians,* 1938 p. 93,
[79] Robert D. Leiter, *The Musicians and Petrillo*.

Weber's first response to the commercial use of musical recordings in the late 1920s, just as electronic recording technology revolutionized recording processes, was to conduct a public relations campaign that touted the superior quality of live music over recorded music. Weber's strategy was to appeal to high culture sensibilities as a way to boost demand for live music, a strategy that was consistent with the union's history of taking the high road whenever they faced controversy over internal policies or external threats. The strategy to boost demand for live music was also consistent with the union's history of positioning itself as a taste making institution, "educating" the "masses" on matters of music and taste. Weber didn't believe that it was realistic or desirable to resist the development of sound recording technology, which he saw as inevitable. Rather, for Weber, the musicians, like all workers, had to find ways to adapt to the new technologies. "The development of machinery cannot be hindered," argued Weber in 1930, "there is no force on earth - or ever will be - able to do this[80]." Weber's position was in stark contrast to James Petrillo, who at that time was president of local 10 in Chicago, but would eventually replace Weber as AFM president. Petrillo was calling for a ban on recording altogether, because he felt that it was absurd for one group of union members to put another group out of work, which was essentially the case with session musicians working in recording studios, and other musicians who played either on radio, or in live venues. Weber considered Petrillo's strategy to be naïve; a throw back to reactionary ideology reminiscent of the Luddites. Weber didn't have the confidence that Petrillo had, since he thought that the union would be defeated if they went on strike and their defeat would end in public ridicule. Accordingly, Weber was confident that less drastic measures would work, because he thought "the public" could be persuaded to agree that live music was better than canned music, and that ultimately there wouldn't be any conflict between records and live music, since he believed (wrongly) that records would not reduce the demand for live music as long as the "public" agreed with the union that live music under all circumstances is better than canned music. Weber was not alone among musicians in the AFM who took that stance. Most of the AFM leadership, with the exception of Petrillo and his circle, believed records were a passing fad, more a novelty for hobby nerds than a serious form of entertainment for consumers of music. For example, members of the Los Angeles Theater Organist's Club believed that mechanical music would never be a viable money making enterprise, claiming that owners of theaters that played "talkie" movies would, "lost their shirts in this latest folly." Organist Gaylord Carter from Los Angeles said, "We thought it [talkies] was just a fad… we all thought it would pass[81]."

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[80] *Official Proceedings,* 1930, p. 30.

There were three parts to the public relations strategy. First, Weber claimed that the cultural experience of live music is far more enriching than listening to "canned" music. Weber made this argument on the grounds that records simply sounded bad, considering the poor quality of sound that was produced by acoustic recording technologies at that time. But he didn't foresee the radical improvements made possible by electronic recording technology. Furthermore, Weber argued that regardless of the quality of sound produced by the mechanical reproduction of music, the experience of live music is always a better experience, period. Here Weber was making a case for the cultural significance of the “aura,” or the presence and authenticity of the specificity of time and place of the live music performance. In opposition to the position taken by cultural theorists like Walter Benjamin, Weber took the position that maintaining the “aura” of live music is an important cornerstone in the protection and development of “culture.” He made this case in two ways; on the one hand he argued that the public benefits from the experience of listening to live music because live music educates the public and helps them develop the skills necessary to understand and criticize “true” art. Recorded music was understood by Weber and most of the union’s leadership to be a fake, a poor substitute for the real thing. The mechanical reproduction of the work of music was a “perversion, which constituted a fatal blow to musical culture,” the union insisted[82]. Secondly, they argued that musicians themselves must be protected from the threat of recorded music. If records reduce the demand for live music, and if consequently potentially talented musicians find that they cannot make a living playing music because there is no demand for their labor, then the music and therefore “culture” ceases to exist. Weber argued that America could not afford to allow its most promising musicians to fail. On the contrary, it was in “the public’s interest” to support such musicians by attending their performances. Thus, Weber appealed to nationalism on the one hand, and the desire for upward mobility on the other. True patriots, according to Weber, would never allow the culture of their nation to degenerate, and individuals that want access to the middle and/or upper class must first learn how to consume “true art,” which in this case was live music, not recorded music. Knowing the difference between “true art” and “mere entertainment” is a principle ritual of upward mobility in the

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[81] Kraft, *Stage to Studio*, p 51

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[82] Ibid, p 53.

American class structure, and the musicians' union appealed to that ritual tradition to save their jobs.

So, in late 1929, the AFM embarked on an advertising campaign to boost demand for live music, a campaign that cost them close to a million dollars, which was a big chunk of change for the union back then. Weber insisted on pursuing the campaign even as thousands lost their jobs in 1929, because he thought the fate of professional musicians ultimately lied with consumers rather than with the union itself. Rather that take control of the issue at the point of production, Weber chose to give consumers the power to save live music. That seemed to him to be a more sustainable approach. Indeed, Weber claimed that he would "spare no expense" in his appeal to consumers. Most of the money was spent on advertising space in 798 newspapers and 24 magazines. In the ads, the AFM warned about the impending doom associated with the "debasement" of art if live music were to fall victim to recorded music. The AFM also appealed to the Federal government to save live music, in order to preserve culture. Writing to the Federal Radio Commission in 1929, the union argued that, "the invasion of the radio field by canned music is destroying the advancement of art at its base by depriving musicians of the necessary means of livelihood[83]." It seemed at first that the ad campaign was making a difference since many of the newspapers that ran the ads also chipped in with editorials that argued for the cultural significance of live music. Part of the advertising campaign involved the establishment of the Music Defense League, an organization created by the AFM for the public. The union printed membership coupons inside their adds so that anyone concerned with saving live music could clip the coupon from the add, sign it, mail it to the union, and become members of the League. In all the union collected over three million membership coupons, which led Weber to believe that he made the right choice in rejecting Petrillo's proposal for an industry wide recording ban. By 1935, however, things changed in favor of Petrillo, because in spite of the positive response to the Music Defense League, the union lost an additional 4,100 jobs since the beginning of the ad campaign[84]. The ad campaign did nothing to stem the tide of massive job losses. As a result, Petrillo's circle in the union was attracting more attention and more followers. Serious discontent was brewing among the rank and file and by the 1937 convention Weber was forced to take a more militant stand in order to save his job as President of the union.

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[83] Ibid, p 83.

Lots of ideas were tossed around at the convention, including ideas that ranged from striking radio and/or the record companies, to enforcing minimum size limits for staff orchestras and radio stations, a tariff system that would impose a tariff on affiliate stations that carried network shows, to the creation of a royalty system for the union that was based on record sales. Weber's tenure as union president was very shaky as early as 1934 when the union lost 50,000 members and $60,000 of annual revenue as a result of declining membership, which in 1934 was down to around 100,000. At the convention in 1937, Weber took a more aggressive posture to save his job by hinting he would be willing to consider using the strike. He had to take that stand because more and more locals like local 174 in New Orleans were backing Petrillo's call for an industry wide recording ban. Weber tried to move slowly and cautiously by exploring the strike option in radio before recording. Weber argued that if radio stations did not maintain staff orchestras that the AFM would strike all of radio. But a ban on recording was already underway in some locals, including local 802 in New York, and local 10 in Chicago.

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[84] Leiter, 60.

Both locals required their members not to take recording engagements in their jurisdictions, a sign that Weber had lost control of the union. To Weber's credit, in the last days of his presidency he reached out to other labor organizations in his impeding conflict with the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) the representatives of radio interests. Weber held AFM strategy meetings in the offices of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) in New York City, to show NAB that the AFM and ASCAP were united in their struggle with radio. ASCAP was struggling with radio over copyright issues in the use of records by radio stations. ASCAP eventually was able to force radio to pay a fee for using copyrighted songs in records, which as a big victory for them, and their allegiance with the AFM was a significant symbolic gesture if nothing else. All of the bravado displayed by Weber after 1937 proved to be of little substance; by 1940 Weber withdrew his threat for a nationwide strike on radio.

Ultimately, Petrillo won the presidency of the musicians' union in 1940 because he exposed the weakness in Weber's strategy that depended on consumers and the federal government to solve the union's problem, rather than the union itself. Petrillo understood that the union had to take its agency back from consumers and the government and act in their own right to solve their own problems. Only the union itself, through use of the strike and by focusing in the point of production as the means to gain leverage, could launch a sustainable attack on the problem of mechanization and job losses. That meant going to the source of the problem: the recording studio. Weber, in an attempt to save face, retired in 1940 citing reasons having to do with his health. It was true that his health was poor, but even if Weber didn't retire, Petrillo would have taken over the union, because he was more popular among the rank and file than Weber by the end of the 1930s for the reasons discussed above, but also because Petrillo made a reputation for himself as a labor leader in Chicago as early as 1914, when he became president of the American Musicians' Union (AMU) – a competing union – at the age of 22!

Petrillo came from a tough background; his father earned a living digging sewers, and the neighborhood Petrillo was raised in was a notoriously rough and tumble place. He became president of local 10 of the AFM after the AMU disbanded in 1922, and he immediately earned a reputation as a leader eager not to shy away from a fight. In 1935 Petrillo was able to get local radio stations to keep full staff orchestras on hand, and to agree to destroy records after one use! In addition to music, the other main use of records on radio was advertising; most radio stations used recorded "transcriptions," which were recorded commercials that often used music as well. Petrillo was able to get Chicago stations to use these records one time only, discarding them after just one use. This was Petrillo's first attempt to find a way to regulate the use of records on radio. In addition to his reputation for taking on employers, Petrillo made a reputation for himself as someone not afraid to take on the shadowy underworld of the mob. During the Prohibition era, the Chicago local under Petrillo's watch was associated with gangsters in the trafficking of alcohol. Petrillo drove around town in an armored car and had bodyguards with him around the clock. In 1924, a bomb exploded on his porch. These were the years of Al Capone's ruthless tenure as mob boss in Chicago, and although Petrillo denied that his union had any connections with mob activity, the fact that a bomb exploded on his porch and the fact that he needed bodyguards was evidence to contrary. All that didn't deter rank and file member of the AFM from naming him president of the international in 1940. On the contrary, his reputation for taking risks and not backing down from fights made him a popular figure in the union. Plus, he always considered himself a union man first, and a musician second. He did play the trumpet, but he described himself as a mediocre musician who was better suited to fight employers than play trumpet. Petrillo's first move after taking office was to pick up the pieces of Weber's failed efforts at mounting a strike on radio. Petrillo pounced on one of the first opportunities he had, which was at radio station KTSP in Minnesota.

On June 28, 1940 contract negotiations between the St. Paul, Minnesota local of the AFM and radio station KTSP, an affiliate of the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), reached an impasse when management at the radio station broke off talks with the union. At that time, KTSP was one of 250 affiliates that held labor contracts with the AFM, as thousands of orchestra musicians – most of them union members – were still barely hanging on to full time employment at radio stations all across the U.S. The issue that caused the break down in contract negotiations between the radio station and the union was the number of musicians on the staff orchestra at KTSP. The St. Paul affiliate, like many network affiliates during the early 1940s, was attempting to "downsize" its staff of musicians. The consolidation and reorganization of network radio by the big three – NBC, CBS and Mutual Broadcasting System (MBS) - in the early 1940s had dramatically reduced demand for flesh and blood musicians at radio stations in small markets all over the U.S. At the time when talks between the union and KTSP broke down, the radio station was using network programs from NBC, shows that were produced and performed in places like New York City, and then broadcast via station affiliates to more "remote" areas like St. Paul, Minnesota. Industry insiders –

appropriately - referred to these network shows as remotes.[85] Many of these “remotes” included concerts performed by the most popular swing bands of the era, like Duke Ellington, Count Basie and Benny Goodman to name just a few of the most popular band leaders.

Prior to the reorganization and consolidation of network radio, musicians all over the states - especially union musicians - were able to find good jobs playing live music for broadcast at smaller market radio stations. Prior to the so called “golden era” of radio in the 1930s and 1940s, radio in the 1920s was a chaotic patchwork of more than 500 different radio stations that were sponsored by individuals, various organizations and private companies, and even as late as 1934 there were still several “independent” radio stations that were content with producing and broadcasting their own regional and local programs. The enormous popularity of radio throughout the 1920s and 1930s created a sustained demand for musicians even as the country struggled to get through the Great Depression because radio provided free entertainment to its listeners.

The 1930s and early 40s was the era of swing music, which was all the rage in America in the after hours hot spots and in the homes of “hepcats” who had radio sets. By 1940 there were some 15 million radio sets in American homes, and millions of listeners tuned in to hear the big band swing concerts aired every evening during prime time. The record industry, which at this time was still in competition with radio for consumers, was reeling from the Depression as people preferred radio to records both because the music on the radio was “free” and the quality of live broadcast music was superior to the lower quality of recorded music, since at the time records could not adequately reproduce the sound or experience of live music[86]. The technology of recording had yet to catch up with the technology of radio. The issue for record producers during these years to try, as much as possible, to accurately recreate the experience of live music on a record, since the live music experience was understood to be the "true" or most "real" experience for consumers of music. Record companies were experimenting with electronic recording technology to improve the quality of recorded sound, but it wouldn't be until after World War II, when the Allies seized magnetic tape recording technology developed by the German military, that the recording industry would be able to dramatically increase the quality of sound recording. Consequently, the AFM enjoyed a tight labor market for live music during radio's golden years, despite the bad economic times of the Depression and perhaps also because of the impending war.

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[85] *Official Proceedings*, 1941 (38-40).

Corporate consolidation and monopolization of the airwaves challenged the power of the AFM, and by the early 1940s development of remote broadcasts threatened to displace thousands of musicians all across America.[87] On the other hand, network radio was a boon to the superstar musicians working in the major media centers, especially New York and Los Angeles. Bandleaders like Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Chick Webb, Woody Herman, Tommy Dorsey, Paul Whiteman and Benny Goodman all benefited enormously from the network broadcasts of their shows, but for the staff orchestras at radio stations in smaller markets outside the major media centers, network programming was a disaster, because it threatened to render them superfluous. Network affiliates like KTSP could save a lot of money by broadcasting remotes, because the remote programs allowed them to use their own staff orchestras much less frequently.

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[86] The radio and record industries remained competitive industries until the 1950s, when, after decades of experimentation and investment, RCA introduced television to the mass market. The medium of television immediately took over the popular variety, drama and music shows from radio, which was left with almost no programming. As a result of television, the radio industry created a symbiotic relationship with the recording industry that remains to this day.

[87] See the *Overture*, newspaper of local 47, American Federation of Musicians, May 1933, 7.

Frustrated by negotiations with management, and concerned that their members would soon be out of work, the St. Paul local asked the President of the AFM International, James Caesar Petrillo, to intervene. Petrillo agreed. His strategy was to pull the plug on network broadcasts of popular, big name concerts if KTSP refused to retain its staff orchestra and agree to the remaining contract demands of the local. Petrillo gave KTSP twenty-four hours to agree to the union's demands or else he would halt the remotes by calling out the big name bandleaders and their orchestras and requesting them to stop playing for remote broadcast. When KTSP refused, Petrillo made good on his word, and on the following day he called for 10 bands – including Tommy Dorsey, Gene Krupa and Woody Herman - to stop playing at NBC and they all agreed. So, on June 29, 1940 when radio listeners in several small market areas like St. Paul tuned in to NBC, they found that their favorite remotes were not on the air that evening. Petrillo was willing to gamble that the networks – NBC in this case, but there would be other cases involving the other networks, especially CBS – would put pressure on their affiliates to capitulate to the union because the networks depended on the popularity of the remotes, especially the big band shows, for lucrative advertising contracts. Petrillo's gamble paid off when the strike on remotes succeeded in squeezing the network and the affiliate. Eventually, the National Broadcasting Company forced its St. Paul affiliate to agree to the union's demands, and all the jobs in the staff orchestra at KTSP were saved.

In July of the same year, a CBS affiliate in Richmond, VA, station WRVA, attempted to lower the wages of the members of its staff orchestra. When the Richmond local was unable to negotiate a contract that would satisfy its members, they too, asked for Petrillo's assistance. Petrillo intervened in the same manner and with the same strategy he used with success in the KTSP case. Petrillo ordered 30 traveling bands to halt remote broadcasts to both CBS and MBS, the third of the three big networks. Just as Petrillo had hoped, CBS pressured their Richmond affiliate to sack its plan to trim the wages of its staff musicians. Station WRVA, like KTSP before, caved in to the union's demands and abandoned its plans to cut wages. Over the next few years, Petrillo and the AFM waged similar struggles in Scranton, Nashville, Akron and a few other places, denying those affiliates the music of Duke Ellington, Lawrence Welk, and Artie Shaw, until they, like the others, capitulated to union demands.[88] It was a dramatic show of solidarity among the rank and file members of the AFM, especially on the part of the celebrity band leaders like Duke Ellington, Gene Krupa and others that they were able to pull off a series of victories over recalcitrant management as they struck radio stations all across the country. The celebrity band leaders had much more to lose than the relatively unknown musicians who played in staff orchestras at small market radio stations, but nonetheless the celebrity musicians were willing to stick their necks out for their lesser known and less appreciated brothers and sisters in the union. The AFM, under the leadership of Petrillo was just beginning to make good use of the strike. Petrillo would soon call for a general strike in the recording industry, but first he had to organize instrumental soloists into the AFM.

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[88] See Kraft, *From Stage to Studio* (125-130).

In 1940, the same year that the musicians' union was able to bring broadcast radio to its knees, Petrillo was faced with a serious obstacle to his plan for a general strike in the recording industry. Instrumental soloists, including the famous violinist Jascha Heifetz, were by and large members of a competing union, the American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA). AGMA was formed in 1936 and it focused mainly on organizing opera singers, but the union also encouraged instrumental soloists who played in operas and symphonies to join, creating competition between the AFM and AGMA. Petrillo realized that if the AFM were to have any chance at winning a general strike on the recording industry, the instrumental soloists would have to be on board. So in August of 1940 Petrillo took action by forbidding AFM members to play any shows with soloists who were not members of the AFM. He gave all instrumental soloists until Labor Day to join the AFM, or they would be without unable to perform, since nearly all the symphonies and orchestras were already organized by the AFM. The only exception was the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and it was only a matter of days before their musicians would join the AFM. The dispute between the two unions received national attention, since many of the soloists that Petrillo was after were household names, like Jascha Heifetz. In fact, Petrillo was ridiculed when he asked – rhetorically – "since when is their any difference between Heifetz playing a fiddle and the fiddler in the Tavern? They're both musicians[89]." Of course Petrillo knew the difference, but it was a smart rhetorical move, because he understood that the union was doomed if it couldn't bridge the high/low divide and promote solidarity among all members regardless of "talent" or fame. Unlike Joseph Weber, who preceded him as AFM President, Petrillo never took the highbrow elitist line, refusing to try and legitimate the musicians' union by positioning the AFM as a gatekeeper of American culture. Rather, Petrillo repeatedly made use of his infamous refrain that both a country fiddler and Jascha Heifetz are first and foremost, workers who belong to a union. By 1940 Petrillo was able to use the name he made for himself in the AFM as the controversial leader of local 10 in Chicago. Rumor had it that Petrillo was close friends with the notorious Al Capone, which gave Petrillo the aura of invincibility in the AFM. Those stories may not be true, but Petrillo was a firebrand of a union leader who was not afraid to use force to get his way. Even as early as 1930 Petrillo began calling for a general strike on the recording industry arguing that militant tactics were need to save union jobs from the coming onslaught of massive job losses at the hands of records and recording technology. Petrillo had used the strike in Chicago with some success and his no holds barred attitude toward management's interests won him widespread popularity in the union despite his poor record on race relations in the union and despite his negative public image as a rabble-rouser. But the timing was right for Petrillo's ascendancy in the musicians' union. His record as president of the Chicago local since 1922 was impressive, with many successful strikes under his belt.

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[89] *New York Times*, August 14, 1940, p. 21:8.

The representatives of the AFM, along with the other power house unions of the time, like the United Auto Workers, the garment worker's union, the United Mine Workers, and the Longshoreman's union, were riding the crest of rank and file militancy, which began in the early 1930s and would take them well beyond the end of the Second World War. Indeed, the years between 1934 and 1947 were the peek years, the zenith of the American labor movement. The United States was racked by labor conflicts from coast to coast during these years as sit-down strikes, wildcat strikes, sick outs, work stoppages and other forms of labor unrest rippled across every corner of the country[90]. Rank and file militancy was so strong that the federal government scrambled to find measures to contain it, beginning with the National Labor Relations Act – also known as the Wagner Act – which was passed in 1935. The NLRA was designed to bring labor into the fold of capital accumulation by officially recognizing the institutions of unions, and by creating stability for investment and growth by giving labor a "voice" in the structure of government and corporate control over the economy. But in spite of attempts by capital and the federal government to the contrary, rank and file workers could not be easily appeased and controlled, even if they were invited to the table as "junior partners" in the planning of the economy in the years leading up to World War Two. When the war began in 1941, President Roosevelt asked for, and received a "no strike" pledge from the AFL and CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) the umbrella groups that represent all workers in the U.S. – for the duration of the war. FDR had hoped he could count on Labor's cooperation during the war, because steady production schedules at full capacity was the key to winning the war, but he was to be disappointed by stubborn rank and file workers in the UMW who walked out of the coal mines in spite of pleas by FDR, and also perhaps most infamously by the AFM's 1942 recording ban. Petrillo's success in the use of the strike in dealing with radio gave him confidence that striking recording studios would also work.

Two years after the strike on remote broadcasts and a year into the Second World War, Petrillo called an industry wide recording ban, pulling all AFM members out of all recording sessions all across the country, including the media centers like Los Angeles and New York. For more than a year no instrumental recordings were made in the United States.[91] This time the issue for the musicians' union was the use of records by radio stations and in jukeboxes at places like taverns and hotels that previously used live musicians. By 1940, there were some four hundred thousand, jukebox machines in use in the United States, costing the union nearly 8,000 jobs.[92] The aim of the recording strike was to save union jobs at radio stations and taverns by striking the recording industry. Recording technology was improving with the development of electronic recording processes and more and more radio stations were playing records on the air as a means to trim their budgets[93]. Musicians' were already feeling the pinch from the development of recording technology, especially since the development of "talkies" or moving pictures with sound. Talking movies displaced thousands of musicians from theatres across the U.S., theatres that were once among the best gigs a musician could find. Petrillo figured that a strike should go to the source of the problem, which according to him was the recording studio. Petrillo had first suggested that the union call a strike over the issue of automation back in 1928 when he was the president of the Chicago local. In fact, Petrillo had been a thorn in the side of President Weber throughout the painful job losses the AFM suffered as the talkies replaced union members in one theatre chain after another in the tens of thousands. Management voices in the movie houses and radio stations were explicit in their declarations that the new sound technology was designed to cut back on labor costs.

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[90] For a detailed account of these strikes see Art Preis, *Labor's Giant Step*, Martin Glaberman, *Wartime Strikes*, and Stanley Aronowitz, *False Promises*.

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[91] Vocal recordings were produced during the AFM's recording ban because singers and vocalists belonged to a separate union, the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA).

[92] Kraft, p. 130.

[93] Although electronic recording processes had dramatically improved the quality of records, live music continued to set the standard for which records were to emulate. The relationship between live and recorded music flip flopped in the mid 1960s, and recording processes became very elaborate projects. Rock music, especially after the Beatles album *Sgt. Pepper's* would use the recording as the referent, where live music concerts were to attempt to sound as good as the record. Studio recording became so intricate that producers and sound engineers were as responsible for aesthetic decisions as the recording artists themselves.

The issues of records and their impact on union jobs came to a head in 1941. That year, the AFM held its annual convention in Dallas, and delegates from all over urged Petrillo to take action. They demanded that the musicians' union "draw the line" against the real enemy of the union, namely, the unrestricted practice of recording and the unregulated use of records. Petrillo agreed and at the annual convention in June of the following year, Petrillo declared that the union would no longer "play at their own funeral." A strike on recording was called and Petrillo's speech was received with vigorous cheers and applause from the audience of delegates. In July, Petrillo sent out a letter to the major record labels and transcriptions companies that read:

> Your license from the American Federation of Musicians for the employment of its members in the making of musical recordings will expire on July 31, 1942, and will not be renewed. From and after August 1, 1942, the members of the American Federation of Musicians will not play or contract for recordings, transcriptions or any other form of mechanical reproduction of music[94].

The aim of the strike was not to eliminate the use records. Petrillo was not that naïve, despite the sometimes Luddite tone to his harsh words on records. There were some, including the followers of Weber, who thought it was foolish to call a general strike, but Petrillo believed it was the only way to save jobs, and the strategy was to force recording companies, the major record labels, to agree to a plan created by the AFM to account for jobs that were lost as a result of the use of records. Going to the source of the problem in the recording studios also dealt a blow to the radio companies who depended on records, and also because by 1942 the radio and recording industries were no longer in competition with one another. On the contrary they had merged into gigantic corporate media conglomerates with tentacles reaching into every medium: radio, records, film, publishing and television. Still, in spite of the size and scope of their adversary, the musicians did not back down. Petrillo figured that musicians were in a unique position to control the application of technology to their craft, because unlike production workers in factories, capital depended on the musician to make a record in the first place, whereas on the assembly line in a factory, machines could replace workers without the cooperation of the workers. The division of labor was different: in most craft production work engineers could design machines to replace or deskill factory floor workers without the consent or knowledge of the worker on the shop floor. With the craft of music making, it's a different matter altogether, because in order for a musical recording to replace a live musician, some other flesh and blood musician must do the work to make the record possible. If musicians who perform the labor of recording refuse, then capital is unable to replace other musicians in other locations in the industry like radio stations, hotels and taverns. Thus, Petrillo counted upon the solidarity among all union members to wrest some control from the record companies over the use of records. Petrillo was banking on the solidarity displayed during the radio strikes of 1940, hoping that level of solidarity would last long enough for the musicians to emerge victorious in the recording ban.

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[94] *International Musician*, July, 1942.

At first, the major record companies held out and refused to negotiate with Petrillo and the AFM, hoping that President Roosevelt and the War Labor Board would rule against Petrillo and force the union back to work. The major record companies also figured they could count on the media to conduct a smear campaign against Petrillo, since the news media had already established an anti-union perspective on labor conflicts during the war. It was only a matter of time before newspapers began grinding their anti-union axes. Papers like the *Washington Post*, and the *Buffalo News*, referred to Petrillo as a “dictator,” a “tyrant,” and a “czar,” making fun of the irony that his middle name was Caesar[95]. One of the major newspapers from Petrillo’s hometown referred to him as “the inflated little nonentity who strong-armed himself into dictatorial power[96].” The thought of a labor union suggesting that workers have some say in the decisions about the conditions where they work, or the security of their jobs, was never really seriously entertained by the mainstream media, since they sided with management’s insistence that only management has the right to make those kinds of decisions. So, Petrillo was called a “dictator” for trying to protect the interests of his constituents. Editorials never really presented a coherent argument that justified their labeling of Petrillo as a tyrant for exercising the union’s right not cause their own employment. Rather, the editorials that attacked Petrillo appealed to knee-jerk jingoism, making the case that a strike during the war was unpatriotic. The NAB financed its own anti-union public relations campaign, paying the New York based public relations firm Baldwin and Mermey $2 million to smear the AFM, and they too, appealed to vulgar jingoism as well as red-baiting in their attacks against Petrillo. In addition to violating the no-strike pledge, argued NAB, the AFM was eroding the morale of the nation when it needed it the most. “Music plays a vital role in war morale,” argued the NAB, as the alternately attacked Petrillo for both breaking the law and morale.[97]. In spite of all the negative press, Petrillo stood his ground insisting that union members would not make the very products that were threatening the destruction of their craft. Petrillo and the AFM did make one concession, however, when they agreed to allow limited recording under the Victory Disk Project, created by the Army to make records specifically for soldiers fighting over seas. Petrillo allowed records to be made under the V-Disc project as long as the U.S. Army agreed to destroy the records after the war, rather than sell them as surplus. The federal government agreed to the terms, and Petrillo was allowed to side step the patriotism issue because he allowed his members, including the artist who was the most popular among the soldiers, Louis Jordan, to make records as part of the overall effort to boost the morale of troops overseas, and the move gave Petrillo some wiggle room in his on going discussions with, and appearances before the War Labor Board during 1942-3.

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[95] Kraft, p 140.
[96] Ibid.

With the patriotism issue somewhat resolved, the major record labels and NAB filed an injunction against the musicians' union claiming the strike creating a restraint on trade, thereby violating the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. Before the passage of the National Labor Relations Act, also known as the Wagner Act in 1937, employers embroiled in labor disputes with their workers would often times use the Sherman Anti-Trust Act to get judges to issue injunctions against strikes, on the legal grounds that strikes were unlawful restraints on trade, which violated the terms of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. Even thought the Sherman Anti-Trust Act was written to curb the power of capital, or the power of monopoly on the part of companies, ironically the Act was more often used against labor than management since most judges at the lower court levels were ideologically opposed to labor's cause. Still Petrillo did not back down, in fact he did the opposite. All the while that the recording ban was being fought over in court, Petrillo called musicians out of radio, banning remote broadcasts as he had done in 1940. Petrillo figured he would match the intensity of NAB and the major record labels inch for inch, even upping the ante be calling more musicians out on strike while legal proceedings dragged on. The NAB and the record companies thus waged the battle on two fronts. On the one hand they attempted to get the judicial branch to rule against the union on the grounds that the strike violated the Sherman Anti-trust act. On the other hand, they appealed to the executive branch, asking the Roosevelt administration to bring Petrillo to testify before the War Relations Board, and force him to abide by the no-strike pledge forged by the leaders of the AFL and CIO and the Roosevelt administrations.

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[97] Ibid.

Good news for the union came first in Chicago where the NAB was pressing their legal case against the musicians' union. The judge overseeing that case, Judge John P. Barnes eventually threw the case out of court on the grounds that he had no juisdiction over the case since it was a labor matter. Barnes ruled that the matter applied to the Wagner Act, not the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. His written account of the issue was a major boost to the union, because it was one of the first times in the 20th century that companies were foiled in their attempt to use the Anti-Trust laws, but also because he challenged the argument made by the NAB attorney Thurman Arnold who attempted to demonstrate that musicians did not face any serious threat of unemployment as the result of the use of records. Judge Barnes flatly denied that records did not threaten musicians' jobs. On the contrary he argued that the numbers demonstrated the converse, namely that half of the professional musicians who had second jobs outside the music industry held those second jobs because "they were not able to make a reasonable living in their chosen field." "This is a controversy between masters and servants," argued Barnes, "a question of whether the servants must make music as the masters direct[98]." Barnes' ruling was a huge victory for the AFM because they beat the Anti-Trust rap, and because the ruling bought them more precious time to conduct their strike. Meanwhile, Petrillo was called before the War Labor Board a move that backfired badly for radio and record companies because they underestimated Petrillo's oratory skills. Petrillo's actions were represented by the press and by management public relations groups as the actions of an unreasonable tyrant because he wouldn't back down to the President or the War Labor Board. Roosevelt himself asked Petrillo to send the musicians back to work, and Petrillo refused, and when Petrillo went before the war Labor Board in July of 1943 he denied that the federal government had the authority to force musicians to work, calling it "involuntary servitude." But Petrillo was able to convince Congress, and to some extent the public that he was not a tyrant when he testified before Congress earlier that year in January, when he appeared before a special Congressional committee organized by Senator Bingham.

Petrillo was the first labor leader called to testify before Congress and he made the most of it, capitalizing on his leadership skills and the charisma he had developed in the rough and tumble days of his tenure in Chicago. Petrillo shined in the spot light and he was able to turn the tables on management and score a major ideological victory for the union on the grand, public stage of Congress. As various Senators peppered Petrillo with questions about the purpose of the strike, he was careful not to answer that the strike was designed to force radio and live venues to hire more musicians, because the union could be busted for conducting a secondary boycott. Rather, Petrillo argued that the strike was about musicians' getting their "fair share" of the profits from the record industry and he suggested that the Congress draft legislation to alter the Copyright Act to create a royalty system of session musicians who work in recording studios, a system that would give them similar copyrights enjoyed by composers and publishers of music. It was a clever move by Petrillo to introduce the idea that the union had a moral and legal case for demanding property rights in recordings, because he couched the demand in a larger context that described the threat that giant corporations and unbridled capitalism posed to the public's well being. Petrillo argued before Congress that instead of investigating the musicians' union, the Congress could better spend the taxpayer's money on an investigation of the "few giant corporations" that had too much power over the industry "at the expense of the live musician[99]." Petrillo also emphasized that his union was helping with the war effort pointing out that his members made records for overseas troops in the V-Disc program. The union leader also reminded Congress that 25,000 AFM members were in the armed forces fighting the war and the union itself held bought war bonds to the tune of thousands of dollars. Petrillo also took a big risk by telling Congress he would end the strike if Congress could demonstrate convincingly that the recording ban posed a serious threat to the war effort. It was Petrillo's way of showing that he was reasonable and willing to negotiate, and it contradicted the image portrayed by the mass media that painted him as a tyrant. Petrillo's skill at responding to tough questions and transforming the issue from an issue of an illegal strike to an issue of the dangers posed by giant corporations gone awry was also a big score for the musicians' union, because Petrillo's rhetorical skills changed the minds of enough Senators, that they recommended, upon the urging of chief counsel, Senator Bingham that Congress enact *no* legislation against the union or the recording ban. Management interests in radio admitted his testimony was a knock out blow. In their trade magazine *Broadcasting*, the voice of the radio industry, editorials admitted that the radio industry had made a mistake in their assessment of Petrillo. In the January 18th issue, the magazine begrudgingly concluded that Petrillo "made a far better witness than was anticipated." One editorial read, "We understand why the AFM elected him president[100]."

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[98] Ibid. 149

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[99] Ibid p 151

The stars finally lined up for the musicians' union when the record companies began to crack. It seemed that the record companies were not able to mount a united stand against the union, because in September 1943 Decca records signed a four year agreement with the musicians' union agreeing to Petrillo's royalty plan, referred to as the "fixed fee" plan. After his testimony before the War Labor Board in July of 1943, Petrillo had sent a proposal to the major record companies including RCA/Victor, Columbia, and Decca. Copies of the proposal also made their way to the radio networks NBC and CBS, companies that had controlling interests in RCA/Victor and Columbia. The radio/recording conglomerated promptly rejected Petrillo's proposal that record companies pay the union a royalty, the amount of which was negotiable, to be used to create jobs for unemployed musicians. Decca was the only record company not tied to radio, so they jumped on the opportunity to come to terms with the union and get a head start on cornering the market by signing recording artists who left RCA/Victor and Columbia. Decca already had 25% of the market for records, and they saw their chance to get more of it as long as the other majors adhered to their stubborn ideology that opposed the rights of the union to ask for a royalty system. Decca's plan worked they were able to strengthen their position in the market, in part by stealing the violinist Jascha

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[100] *Broadcasting*, January 18, 1943, p 39.

Heifetz - who was himself a member of the AFM – away from RCA/Victor, a move that gave Decca enormous publicity, not to mention profits. The signing of Decca was followed by scores of independent labels as well, and RCA/Victor and Columbia along with their family of subsidiary labels eventually had to come to terms with the AFM because they were losing too much money. It was just a matter of time. RCA and Columbia mustered one more, feeble attempt to get Roosevelt to lift the ban, but Roosevelt could not, citing Decca's willingness to work out a deal with the union as a model that should be followed by the other two major record labels. So, in November of 1944 RCA/Victor and Columbia caved in to the demands of the musicians' union by agreeing to the royalty system.

It was truly remarkable that the AFM won that strike in the face of so much adversity from both capital and the federal government, and the aftermath had implications far and wide for the labor movement in the U.S. Indeed, the victory in the great recording strike of 1942 was one of the most significant events in American labor history because it forced employers to acknowledge, and take responsibility for job losses that resulted from automation – in this case records that were used in both juke boxes and on the radio. The AFM was able to persuade record labels to pay a royalty to the union for every record sold in America, and the funds were then used to hire unemployed union musicians to play concerts in cities across the states that were free of charge for the public. Thousands of underemployed musicians have been the beneficiaries of this arrangement since the end of the great recording industry strike. The AFM enjoyed many victories involving labor/management disputes in the music industry throughout the 1940s, including a second recording ban in 1946, and Petrillo remarked in an interview, "I believe the chains are beginning to realize that when I say a strike will be called, it will be called."[101] The great victory that came from the recording strike by the musicians' union established a model for unions in the mining, automotive, steel, printing and other industries, where workers jobs were threatened by the application of technology. All of the agreements between labor and capital that followed the war, agreements that have become known collectively as "welfare capitalism" have their origins in the musicians' strike, because that strike established a pattern of relations between labor and capital that forced capital to take more responsibility for the well being of workers. Arrangements like pension plans, workmen's compensation insurance, unemployment benefits are all based on the premise that the social costs of technological developments - especially labor saving technologies – have to be carried by capital; such social costs are the burden of capital *not* labor. This profound change in social relations of production between labor and capital was a huge ideological victory, but capital would fight back in Congress with the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act and the Lea Act, that were designed to weaken the power of the strike weapon.

In terms of post Taft-Hartley labor law, the strategy that Petrillo used in times of labor/management conflict was a classic example of a secondary strike, where a union uses one employer to force another employer to accept the contract demands of the union. The key to winning the strikes on radio was that Petrillo was able to use the union's star members, the most popular recording artists of the day, including the likes of Duke Ellington, Gene Krupa, Tommy Dorsey, and Lawrence Welk, as effective leverage in forcing network affiliates and record labels to capitulate because the networks themselves depended on the popularity of the super star musicians for lucrative advertising contracts, while the affiliates, in turn, depended on the remotes. In fact, Petrillo was so successful in winning strikes and forcing both radio networks and the major record labels to cave in to union demands, that he became one of the main, if not *the* main target of the architects of the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act that seriously undermined the power of unions in the United States by outlawing the secondary strike. Petrillo and the AFM were also the targets of the Lea Act, which prohibits the practice of "feather-bedding," where a union "forces" an employer to hire more workers than are "necessary" for the task at hand. Radio stations had complained that the AFM forced them to hire musicians that were almost never used. According to the employer's association of radio stations, the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), most AFM members simply hung around radio stations, basically getting paid for doing nothing. Congress agreed with NAB, and passed the Lea Act as a direct attack upon the AFM. Petrillo, despised by some, admired by others, was one of the most powerful labor leaders in the states, and along with other labor leaders like John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers, Sydney Hillman of the garment workers and Walter Reuther of the United Auto Workers, was in the national spotlight on a regular basis.

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[101] See the *Interlude*, official paper of local 9, Boston, Ma, American Federation of Musicians, November, 1940, 7.

Things change, however, and unfortunately for musicians in the U.S., the American Federation of Musicians, once one of the most powerful unions in the country, lost their vice grip on the music recording industry beginning in the early 1950s. The solidarity enjoyed by union in the 1940s, the solidarity that produced a string of victories over radio and record companies collapsed in the 1950s with the arrival of rock and roll. Solidarity collapsed as a result of the union's exclusion - if not in reality, certainly in the imagination – of rock and roll music on the basis of aesthetic preference. In less than two decades, just as rock and roll was racing up the *Billboard* charts, the union was no longer the powerhouse that it was in the 1940s. Most of rock and roll music was produced by independent labels, which were by and large non-union employers. By the mid 1950s, the indie labels, many of which were non-union employers captured more than half the American market for recorded music. By the 1970s, the music recording industry had morphed into what I refer to as a "post-Fordist" corporate regime, characterized by the farming out of the *production* of records to smaller, so-called "indie" labels, while gaining control over the entire industry by monopolizing *distribution*.[102] This spelled bad news for the AFM, because most of the so-called indies didn't and still don't have labor contracts with the union. Today, we hear very little about the American Federation of Musicians in the major media outlets in the U.S., and we hear even less about popular recording artists speaking out on behalf of the union and their less fortunate sisters and brothers in the industry. Solidarity between star recording artists and their lesser-known colleagues in the industry no longer exists the way it did in the 1940s. The collapse of solidarity within the musicians' union is even more curious considering that rock and roll is the organic music of the working class, and it is to that story that we now turn.

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[102] See Michael Roberts, "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag."

CHAPTER THREE:

HAVE YOU HEARD THE NEWS? THERE'S GOOD ROCKIN' TONIGHT! : WILDCATS, HEPCATS AND THE BIRTH OF ROCK N ROLL

"Rock n roll is about freedom."

-- Chuck Berry

Rhythm and blues, and rockabilly, both of which eventually became knows as rock and roll, emerged out of a unique period of social unrest in the United States[103]. The explosive energy of rock and roll music can be traced back to the epic labor struggles of the 1940s, which spawned a class-consciousness that provided a rich context for a new rebellious, audacious, playful and promiscuous form of electrified "folk" music, namely, rhythm and blues, and half a generation later, rockabilly. Rock and roll musicians took the electricity of the wildcat strike movement of rank and file workers during the 1940s and plugged it in – literally – and through amplified guitars for the next three decades. Rock and roll, in short, expressed the working class pretensions of the 1940s. You can hear it in the form of the music as well as in the content of the lyrics. Sometimes, working class pretensions were made explicit in the lyrics of rock and roll tunes, but in most cases, it's in the music itself, the rhythms, the heavy backbeat, pounding boogie-woogie piano, walking bass lines that go boom, boom up and down, the noisy, growling saxophones and especially the guitars, which were so loud the singers had to shout to heard, ushering in a new genre of singers in the late 1940s known collectively as the blues shouters. Of course, they wanted to shout anyways, because the late 1940s were ripe for shouting; the zeitgeist of the wildcat strike possessed the blues shouters and the jump blues bands as a whole. Such is the social situation of music, as Adorno first outlined in 1932. Although my point of view on the popular music of the 1940s is practically the opposite of Adorno's, nevertheless I agree with his claim that music contains and expresses social relations[104]. In other words, working class pretensions are not always overt or clearly articulated, but if you look in the right places you can find it, which is another way of saying that "class-consciousness" is an amorphous, elusive "thing," and sometimes theoretical perspectives act as blinders that prevent social critics from noticing phenomena just beneath their own noses. Such is the case with rock and roll music and working class pretensions. Rock and roll hepcats are forever linked historically to wildcats, but that story is still largely untold[105].

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[103] I use rock and roll and rhythm and blues interchangeably, because the underlying structure of the music is the same. I make a distinction between rock and roll and rhythm blues only where I explain how the music industry and musicians themselves made distinctions in their recollections of the development of rock and roll. The trade magazines like *Billboard* made name changes to the music in the 1950s, but most of the musicians who were playing rock and roll in the 1950s considered the music to be more or less the same as rhythm and blues. There are important historical reasons for discussing the name change, and I make mention of those reasons where it is appropriate.

In the 1950s in particular, social critics of "mass" society, from both the left and the right side of the political spectrum, considered popular culture, which included pop music, to be an anathema to cultural progress, since form the left, pop culture was viewed as part of an "industry" of culture, a corporate creation designed to control or co-opt the working class, whereas from the right it was seen by conservative critics as the decline of culture in general. For the cultural right wing, popular culture was viewed as a version of the tyranny of the masses phenomenon, where the uneducated, savage masses were destroying the cultural achievements of society, sending Western culture back toward chaos and disorder. Since the late 1960s, cultural critics on the left have responded to both criticisms of popular culture, making a case that rock and roll, as popular culture, is both a legitimate aesthetic worthy of serious criticism as well as an agent of progressive social change, however, the working class roots of rock and roll have yet to be clearly understood by left leaning social critics. Rock and roll historians usually point to the 1950s as the origin of rock and roll, and make the case that rock and roll emerged specifically as a phenomenon of youth culture[106]. While it's true that rock and roll of the 1950s was central in the formation of a youth oriented counter-culture that began in the 1950s, and developed further in the 1960s, it would be incomplete as well as a misinterpretation to reduce rock and roll to mere youth culture. On the other hand the histories of rock and roll that trace rock and roll further back into the 1940s or 1930s neglect social context and specifically ignore the working class origins of rock and roll. Most of these histories of rock and roll music are "internalist" narratives that trace the development of the music itself as if social context matters only as *background*[107]. For Adorno, however, the *content* of music itself *is* social relations. There are excellent histories of rock and roll that trace the structure and form of rock and roll to the blues, but the emphasis is usually on the music itself, and if there is some treatment of social context, then the discussions usually revolve around race, to the exclusion of class[108]. There are important exceptions, but very few histories of rock and roll go back as far as the 1940s, and when one looks at what was going on inside America during the 1940s, rock and roll makes much more sense[109]. Wildcat strikes were what was going on in America during the 1940s.

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[104] See Adorno's groundbreaking 1932 essay, "On the Social Situation of Music," reprinted in *Essays on Music*, edited by Richard Leppert (Berkeley, University of California Press 2002), pp 391-436.
[105] The important exception is the work of George Lipsitz.

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[106] See Simon Frith, *Sound Effects*.

[107] For a good "internalist" history of rock and roll, see *Rock of Ages: the Rolling Stone History of Rock and Roll,* by Ed Ward et al. (New York Rolling Stone Press/Summit Books 1986). While one can learn a lot about the history of rock and roll itself from this book, it remains that social context is background setting relatively far removed from the content of the music. There are good discussions of biographical information of musicians, what region of the country they came from, how they learned certain techniques from older traditions of folk music, but an analysis of class relations is marginalized to mere background setting. Discussions may mention a musicians class background, but not how class relations are expressed through the form and content of the music. Nick Tosches has captured the rebellious mood or rock and roll better than any other writer/critic, but in his accounts of rock and roll, the rebellious spirit of rock and roll seems to hang in the air all by itself, like a rebel without a cause. There is no adequate analysis of where that rebelliousness comes from. See Nick Tosches, *Unsung Heroes of Rock and Roll* (New York Da Capo Press 1999).

On June 5th of 1941, 12,000 workers walked out of their jobs at North American Aviation plant in Inglewood, California. At the time, North American Aviation held a defense contract with the federal government for the production of airplanes for the military. Workers at North American had recently won recognition from the company for union representation by the United Auto Workers (UAW) and when union negotiations with management for a pay increase from 40 cents an hour – which at the time was far below poverty level and ten cents lower than the federal government offered for "relief" work at the Works Progress Administration (WPA) – to a 75 cent an hour minimum, rank and file workers voted to go out on strike without permission from the top brass at the UAW. President Roosevelt, worried that the wildcat strike at NAA might jeopardize his plans for war preparation, put pressure on the leaders of the international of the UAW back in Detroit to put an end to the strike. The UAW agreed that the strike was a serious problem and sent their Vice President, Dick Frankensteen out to Inglewood to persuade the workers to return to the plant and get back to work, but his efforts failed. After rank and file workers rebuked Frankensteen and other management allies in the union leadership circles of the UAW, management at North American Aviation turned the dispute over to the National Defense Mediation Board, which was later renamed the National War Labor Board after the U.S. entered the war later that year on December 7th. Management at North American Aviation (NAA) predicted, correctly, that the board would stall indefinitely and force the President to step in on the side of NAA. FDR did step in, and as predicted, he warned that if workers did not go back to work, he would send in the army to break the strike and take over the plant in the name of "national emergency."

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[108] See Glenn C. Altshculer's *All Shook Up: How Rock and Roll Changed America* (New York Oxford University Press 2003). Altshculer's well-written and interesting history reproduces the mistakes that are typically made in the writings on rock and roll. Altschuler has a chapter or race and rock and roll and a chapter youth culture and rock and roll, as do most histories of rock and roll, but his analysis of class remains secondary, as if class doesn't matter as much as race or age. He has a chapter on the "popular culture" wars, where class seeps into his analysis only in a displaced form. Nowhere is there an extended analysis of the specifically working class characteristics of rock and roll. Perhaps race and class can be pulled apart analytically, but race and class are lived experiences that simultaneously shape our being in the world, and any interpretation that separates race from class in an explanation of rock and roll seriously skews our understanding of that peculiar form of music in American history.

[109] The most important exception is the work of George Lipsitz, in particular his book *Rainbow and Midnight*. There are also good sociological analyses of rock and roll, like Simon Frith's *Sound Effects*, but Frith sees rock and roll as primarily a phenomenon of 1950s youth culture, rather than an expression of 1940s working class culture. My understanding of rock and roll is influenced more by Lipsitz.

Although war was still 6 months away, at least officially, FDR had been secretly gearing up for war a year earlier and he was demanding that labor go along with his plans for no interruptions in production during preparation for the impending war as well as for the duration of war once war was declared by Congress. Roosevelt was confident that he could drop the hammer on the striking workers because he had the support of many high ranking labor officials in the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) who agreed to the terms of his war preparation production plans in manufacturing that included most importantly, no strikes and little to no wage increases for workers throughout the duration of the war. In addition to the top brass at the UAW, which included Frankensteen, Walter Reuther and RJ Thomas, Sidney Hillman the leader of the garment workers union, William Green, President of the AFL and Philip

Murray, President of the CIO all infamously approved of FDR's plan to break the strike at NAA on the grounds of "national emergency."

So, on June 12th, FDR sent in the army to break the strike at North American Aviation. When the 3,500 troops arrived at the plant in the Los Angeles neighborhood they were faced with a picket line of workers more than 6,000 strong. At first, the workers refused to move. Then the army officers ordered their troops to point machine guns at the picket line and fix bayonets to their rifles. Still, workers on the picket line didn't budge until finally one worker, Carl Celmment, was stabbed in the leg by a bayonet. A fight then broke out and the troops were ordered to beat the strikers with the butts of their rifles until the workers gave in and the picket line dispersed. Sensing defeat, the strikers returned to work the following day and the leaders of the UAW local in Los Angeles who approved of the strike were fired by NAA with the enthusiastic approval of the top leadership of the UAW international[110]. It was the first time that FDR used the army to break up a strike on U.S. soil, but it would not be the last. It was also the first time that management interests, the federal government *and* union leadership worked in unison against the demands of the rank and file members of a local union.

Remarkably, in spite of the failure of autoworkers to win at NAA, and in spite of the overwhelming odds against them, workers all over the U.S. felt a surge of power against corporate opposition, the federal government *and* their own union "leadership," because they realized that once the U.S. entered the war, there would be an increase in demand for labor, and that meant leverage for workers. Indeed the demand for labor had already gone up by the time of the wildcat strike at NAA, because FDR increased U.S.

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[110] The account of the strike appears in the *New York Daily News* from June 10th, and it is described in detail by Art Preis in *Labor's Giant Step* (New York, Pioneer Publishers, 1964).

factory production for the British as part of the Lend-Lease Act of 1941. While the workers at NAA failed in 1941, the tide was soon to turn in the favor of American rank and file workers. Eventually NAA was forced by the Roosevelt Administration to give its workers a raise, and although it wasn't as much as the workers asked for, it signaled a change in the direction of rising wages for all workers, namely up.

Steep increases in the demand for labor meant that workers would be able to get more for less. For most workers who left rural areas for a defense job in the urban factories in the North and out West, living in the big city was fun, especially if you had a decent paycheck. When factory workers who were working in the defense plants got a taste for the improved lifestyle that went along with a relatively good paycheck, they wanted more and they knew they could get more because Uncle Sam was willing to spend, and spend big for wartime production. The issue was how to get the companies that held the defense contracts to share the newfound wealth with their workers.

Just prior and during WWII, more than 16 million people joined the armed forces, and in the effort to beef up production for war, American companies drew upon 15 million new workers, 9 million of those were people who migrated from rural areas to urban production centers that were located primarily in the North and out West. Among the new wartime workers were 6 million women and over 1 million African Americans, the majority of whom had migrated out of the South. The massive migration of workers was the largest ever seen in America. All told, more than 4 million people had left rural areas from 30 different states across America for production centers in urban areas in 18 other states from 1940-1946. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the overall increase in population within the cities that served as wartime production centers was around 19%, whereas for African Americans the increase in population was close to 50%!

Huge demographic shifts as the result of the steep increase in the demand for labor meant that workers had the upper hand even in the face of a hostile business community, the Presidential Administration *and* a union bureaucracy that demanded sacrifice and obedience in the name of patriotism and national "emergency." The years between 1941-1946 were unique years for American workers, because they had unusual power over American companies and an unusual willingness to use their main weapon, the wildcat strike. Worker pretensions among the rank and file were, during these years, at an all time high in the history of the American labor movement. It was not coincidence that these were also the years that gave birth to rock and roll music in America.

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt was able to get an "official" no strike pledge in writing from nearly all of America's labor unions and he was confident that wartime production would proceed without any delays or interruptions by upstart workers like those from NAA. Union leaders guaranteed FDR that their members would remain loyal to the war effort by working as hard as possible, without interruption and without demanding wage increases! Meanwhile Roosevelt allowed businesses to raise prices without limits, and many of the government contracts with private sector companies guaranteed large profit margins[111]. It seemed as if most union leaders were out of touch with the spirit of their rank and file members, since practically all of the top brass at the major labor unions were behind Roosevelt's push for no strikes. Of all the strikes that occurred during the war, only two union leaders backed their rank and file,

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[111] The best accounts of labor's struggle at home during the war are told by Martin Glaberman in *Wartime Strikes: The Struggle Against the No-Strike Pledge in the UAW During World War II*, (Detroit bewick/ed 1980) and *Labor's War at Home* by Nelson Lichtenstein.

James Petrillo of the American Federation of Musicians and John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers. Lewis and Petrillo were willing to ride the crest of strike waves rather than attempt to damn up the desire of the rank and file, and Lewis and Petrillo were able to force the Roosevelt administration cave in to their demands due to the strength of the rank and file. In spite of convincing the majority of labor leaders to go along with his strategy, FDR's wartime production plans were foiled because wildcat strikes spread like wild fires all across American during the war. Union leaders were unable to persuade rank and file members to go along with the no strike pledge. In 1941 there were 4,288 strikes involving 2,362,620 workers totaling 23,047,556 "man" days of idleness. Between the years 1942-1943 the numbers of strikes dropped to 2,968 and 3,752 respectfully, but they shot back up to 4,956 in 1944 and 4,750 in 1945. In 1945 a whopping 38,025,000 "man" days of labor were lost to wildcat strikes that involved an incredible 12.2% of the workforce, over 3.4 million workers![112] Workers felt so much power they walked out on many issues that might seem trivial today. For example, in 1944, 300 auto workers at a GM factory in Detroit walked off the job when management attempted to ban smoking, and shortly before the end of the war workers at a Cadillac factory in Detroit walked off the job when they found out that they would not be allowed to play checkers at work! Imagine workers trying something like that today. More importantly for purposes of this discussion, many of the wildcat strikes were playful and celebratory, in contrast to the "serious" sometimes-pathetic strikes we see today. In Fairfield, Alabama in 1944, wildcat strikers held a "jitterbug" dance in the street just outside of the windows of the management offices at the mill were they were on strike.

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[112] "Work Stoppages Caused by Labor-Management Disputes in 1945," *Monthly Labor Review*, May 1946, page 720.

Management could do nothing but watch their workers dance in the street. In 1943 workers in Stamford, Connecticut conducted a general wildcat strike that shut down the entire city, and a reporter recalled that the atmosphere felt more like a carnival than a strike[113].

The wildcat strike data from the early to mid 1940s are truly remarkable numbers especially when you compare them to 1937, which is usually understood by labor historians as the most tumultuous year of labor unrest and the heyday of labor's strength and accomplishments. In 1937 the year the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the National Labor Relations Act was constitutional, and the same year of the famous sit down strike by autoworkers in Flint Michigan, there were a total 4,740 strikes. While 1937 was an important year for American labor, it doesn't compare to the remarkable confidence and courage that workers displayed between 1941-1946.

While the strike at NAA was a loss for labor, the greatest victory that turned the tables for the labor movement – with the possible exception of the musicians' strike - was the remarkable victory of the United Mine Workers (UMW). Just as was the case in all areas of wartime production, mine workers were furious with the Roosevelt Administration for requiring workers to make sacrifices while corporations got fat on record breaking profits from wartime contracts with the federal government. Workers were asked to get by on less and promise not strike, while there were no limits placed on prices or profits for companies. In short, business was not asked to sacrifice for the war in the same way as labor. For workers on the other hand, food costs shot up 125% while the President was demanding a wage freeze on all workers, when on October 3, 1942 FDR issued Executive Order 9250, which called for a national halt on wage increases for the duration of the war. Meanwhile, inflation across the board shot up more than 22%. In the case of mining, mine operators were authorized by the Roosevelt Administration to continue raising their prices on coal while their workers were asked to get by on less and less, and all this on top of the fact that the most dangerous job in America during the war was being a coal miner[114]. So in January of 1943 the coal miners began one of many unauthorized walkouts. In all, there were several wildcat strikes by coalminers and each time that FDR threatened to discipline the coalminers, they simply walked out again, and their leadership, including their President John L. Lewis, *approved* of the strikes. On April 29, 1943 Roosevelt wrote to UMW President Lewis that if the 41,000 bituminous miners on "illegal" strike in Pennsylvania and Ohio did not get back to work, that he would use his powers as Commander in Chief to send in the Army and Navy to take over the mines. The mineworkers responded by pulling 10,000 *more* miners out of the pits in Ohio. By June, there were more than 530,00 coal miners on strike and there was nothing the Roosevelt Administration could do about it. FDR even threatened military conscription and jail time for striking workers, and still the miners did not budge. In fact, after hearing the news that Roosevelt threatened to put them in jail immediately if they didn't get back to work, mineworkers *extended* their wildcat strike two extra days beyond when they said they would end it, as a way to show the President who was boss. It was truly remarkable, the level of solidarity among workers, which has never been surpassed since then. Never before had workers stood up to employers, a hostile media and the President of the United States himself and won! The miners' strike, along with the musician's strike in 1942, was one of the most significant strikes in the history of American labor because they made the President of the United States back down.

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[113] See Lipsitz, *Rainbow*, p. 22 and 123.

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[114] The best account of the coal miners strike is in Preis, *Labor's Giant Step*, pages 174-197.

The coal miners' and musicians' striking spirit spread all across the country. In Detroit, more than 30,000 workers walked out on Chrysler and Dodge, and in Akron, Ohio 50,000 rubber workers went on strike. Workers all across America pointed to the hypocrisy of fighting against fascism abroad, while the President was himself practicing fascism at home by threatening to put workers in jail if they refused to work for pitiful wages while companies were allowed to raise prices and rake in record profits from wartime contracts that guaranteed huge profits. It wouldn't look good if Roosevelt *forced* people to work, after all, that was partly what we were fighting against, the Nazi system of slave labor camps. Morally, FDR didn't have a leg to stand on, not as long as he didn't require equal sacrifices from big business.

Black workers, in particular, pointed to the hypocrisy of fighting abroad against the Nazi ideology of racial superiority, while here at home blacks suffered under the injustice of Jim Crow in the South and racial discrimination in the factories of the North, where black workers always were paid less for the same work as white workers. A. Philip Randolph, leader of the black union, the Sleeping Car Porters, and the first Civil Rights leader of the modern era, realized he had a chance to push for racial equality in the defense plants once the war seemed inevitable. Randolph organized a plan in 1941 for a massive march on Washington to protest the appalling working conditions and shameful wages faced by black workers at companies that were on the public dole. FDR, faced with a tight labor market and the impending prosecution of the war, gave in to Randolph's demands and issued Executive Order 8802 that made racial discrimination against black workers in defense plants that held contracts with the federal government punishable by law. In addition to Randolph's massive organizational efforts, black workers in several union locals also staged their own wildcat strikes to force equality between black and white workers. As early as August, 1941 black workers at the Dodge Motor Company in Detroit, feeling a boost from Roosevelt's Executive Order banning racial discrimination in defense plants, staged two different wildcat strikes to protest company practice of promoting only white workers to better paying jobs, and their efforts were successful in forcing Dodge to end its discriminatory practices and begin promoting black workers. These wildcat strikes by black workers, along with the efforts of A. Philip Randolph, created the conditions for the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s. Blacks in the military received more support from Uncle Sam at the end of the war as well, when Truman ordered the racial integration of the armed forces, a promise made but never fulfilled by FDR.

After the end of the war, wildcat strikes continued and American rank and file workers set a world record for most man-hours of labor lost in 1946 with 4.6 million workers involved in strikes! Wildcat strikes occurred over many issues, from issues having to do with working conditions to issues about pay and benefits. In some cases, workers would walk out while on the job if they observed a foreman verbally abuse or otherwise mistreat a co-worker, or if they perceived that a co-worker was not given due process during a legal grievance procedure. The main issue, however, was that workers were continuing to refuse to go along with a war plan that allowed companies to make limitless profits from wartime contracts, while workers were asked to get by with less. War is big business, very big business, with huge profits to be made. Between the years 1940 – 1944 the government turned over more than $175 billion in military contracts to approximately 1,800 companies, the beginning of the phenomenon that Eisenhower, in his famous speech from 1960, referred to as the military-industrial complex. The money was far from evenly distributed among the 1,800 companies that held contracts with the Pentagon. Of the 1,800 companies involved, 100 walked away with $117 billion. Still, the pie did get bigger all the way around; it's just that workers didn't get their "fair" share of the pie. The U.S. economy almost doubled in size during the war, and yet the President called for a wage freeze for workers, while companies were allowed to raise prices in the era of increased aggregate demand[115]. Widespread awareness of these severe inequities among workers led to the largest working class revolt in American history. Plus, wartime workers in the urban production centers enjoyed the exciting life they had made for themselves since leaving the country for the big cities. Urban life was especially fun at night, when after punching the time card at the end of their shift, workers escaped the drudgery of factory life and found a whole new life of leisure waiting for them in the after hour night clubs. Workers were unwilling to give up the urban culture of leisure and pleasure they had created during the war, and since a big paycheck was necessary to keep that culture afloat, workers were eager to fight for more. The numerous victories that resulted from the use of the wildcat strike during the war had given workers the power to create their new urban culture and the culture sustained the confidence and optimism expressed by workers that lasted for the better part of two decades. At the center of this new urban, working class culture was rhythm and blues music. Rhythm and blues music was shaped by and helped to shape the working class culture of opposition and optimism in the late 1940s.

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[115] Civilian Production Administration, *Industrial Mobilization for War: History of the War Production Board and Predecessor Agencies* (Washington, D.C.:GPO, 1947)

In 1946, workers were fed up with wage freezes and wartime rationing and especially since the war was officially over, they felt that American companies should pay up. There was no longer any moral high ground for either management or the Truman administration to stand upon. The belief among workers was that they had paid their dues and made sacrifices for the war and now it was time for American corporations and the U.S. government to make right by the workers and pay up. The economy doubled in size by the end of the war, and workers demanded their share of the pie. Workers everywhere were participating in wildcat strikes for these reasons. There was also widespread fear among workers that unemployment would skyrocket as the veterans returned home from the war. Some workers, including rubber workers at Firestone and Goodyear called for a 30-hour workweek at 40 hours pay as a plan to avoid unemployment increases at war's end. One of the most famous strikes that year was the general strike in Oakland.

Department store workers, members of the Department Store and Specialty Clerks Union Local 1265 went on strike at Hasting's and Kahn's department stores in November of 1946. Teamsters supported the strike by conducting a secondary boycott, by refusing to carry any "hot" cargo on their trucks, that is, by refusing to make deliveries to the two stores. When the department stores tried to hire non-union truck companies to deliver their goods, all hell broke loose. When news traveled that the police were called in to protect trucks that were crossing the picket lines, workers all over Oakland took to the streets to block traffic and create gridlock. It took less than 24 hours for more than 100,000 workers to join in the general strike, which was eventually approved by the Alameda County AFL Labor Council. In addition to closing most stores downtown, workers prevented anyone who didn't have a union card from entering downtown. Workers walked the streets and ordered all stores closed except for the vitally important stores like grocery stores, pharmacies and bars! Keeping the bars open was their way of ensuring the general strike would maintain a playful, raucous atmosphere. As part of their effort to make sure bars stayed open during the strike, workers pulled jukeboxes out onto the streets so that people who couldn't fit on the inside of the bars also had a chance to partake in the dancing and festivities in general.

You could pretty much guarantee that on that jukebox were many records by Louis Jordan, the "grandpa" of rhythm and blues and rock and roll. During the 1940s Jordan had several smash hits, many of which sold over million copies, including "Choo-Choo A Boogie," "Ain't Nobody Here but Us Chickens," "G.I. Jive," and "Saturday Night Fish Fry," to name a few. With the exception of perhaps Hank Williams, it was Louis Jordan, more than any other musician singer/songwriter in America, who had captured the imagination of American workers during the 1940s. The zeitgeist of the working class rebellion of the 1940s can be found in rhythm and blues and early rock and roll music, especially the playfulness of the heavy back beat and the outrageously funny lyrics that emphasize having a good time while challenging authority, whether it's the boss, the landlord, the President of the United States, your own union boss, or the cop who may be trying to break up your party! All these themes made their way into Louis Jordan's music and the rest of the rock and roll generation of the late 1940s and early 1950s. If you think rock music in the 1960s was rebellious, it was no big thing compared to the music and characters involved in the 1940s and 1950s. The generation of rock musicians who immediately followed Jordan, including jump blues musicians like Amos

Milburn, Wynonie Harris, Big Joe Turner, electric blues musicians like Howlin' Wolf and Muddy Waters and "hillbilly" musicians like Hank Williams were all themselves workers, and their experiences working in factories and fields as well as their experiences as part of the largest working class rebellion in American history profoundly shaped their music. Working class demands for more leisure, the refusal of delayed gratification and the remarkable confidence and audacity displayed by rank and file workers throughout the forties expressed itself in rock and roll, especially the raucous rhythm and blues music of the late forties, which all began with Louis Jordan in 1940.

Louis Jordan was born in 1908 in Brinkley, Arkansas. His father, James Jordan was himself a musician and a teacher, who, in addition to learning the blues from W.C. Handy, toured the country as a member of the popular minstrel group, the Rabbit Foot Minstrels. Jordan was encouraged by his father to follow in his footsteps, learning to play the saxophone by age seven, and by his teen-age years he was touring with his father's band, the Brinkley Brass Band as well as with the Rabbit Foot Minstrels. After he graduated from high school, Louis Jordan toured with Jimmy Pryor's Imperial Serenaders, where he met the legendary blues singer, Ma Rainey. Rainey's and Handy's blues influence and the Vaudeville experience from the Rabbit Foot Minstrels helped Jordan develop a new style, but he had to make his way up North to the major media centers of the country before he was able to land a major label recording deal with Decca records.

Jordan's first big break came in 1932, when he was invited to join Chick Webb's band in New York City. Chick Webb was famous for his "battle of the bands," the competitions he sponsored that featured improvisational duels – jam sessions – between some of the best big bands including Duke Ellington's, Count Basie's, and Benny Goodman's. In the next few years Jordan made a name for himself in the jazz scene including a recording gig backing Louis Armstrong for *Victor* records. In 1939 Jordan stepped out on his own, taking his Tympany Five on a cross-country tour, while booking several recording sessions. During the tour, Jordan developed a series of comedy routines for his popular tunes, adding a vaudeville component that he learned from his days touring with the Rabbit Foot Minstrels. The skits were very popular with his audiences wherever the Tympany Five performed, but Jordan received serious criticism from the black bourgeoisie, who considered his form of "entertainment" degrading. According to Baraka, the black bourgeoisie supported the big bands like Duke Ellington's, because Duke appropriated an *highbrow* aesthetic, which appealed to the black middle class striving to separate itself from the "low" folk tradition of the rural based blues music. The black bourgeoisie labeled the jump blues performers like Louis Jordan, "Uncle Toms," which deeply offended Jordan[116].

Regardless, Jordan was able to broaden his base of fans and was very popular among the black *and* white working class especially in the North and out West. Jordan never allowed his critics to get under his skin, arguing that "clowning is an honorable tradition." He also said that he had always wanted to be an *entertainer*, not just a musician. Jordan modeled his style of dancing, clowning and use of street vernacular after Cab Calloway, and Jordan cared more about broadening his base of fans than pleasing the black bourgeoisie. The kinds of criticisms Jordan received from both the black bourgeoisie and bebop musicians were a sign of what would return in the 1950s during the cultural back lash against rock'n'roll. While Jordan was himself a major label recording artist and a member of the American Federation of Musicians, the music and musicians he inspired – namely rock'n'roll – was condemned by professional musicians during the 1950s and the AFM refused to organize rock'n'roll musicians. Jordan's recordings were all the products of union shops, and he was signed to a major record label for his entire career, but Jordan's music signaled a change to come, a changeover to rhythm and blues, but the AFM would never recognize the music that Jordan introduced until 1970, when they finally put a rock band on the cover of their newspaper, the *International Musician*.

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[116] Baraka, *Blues People*.

The music Jordan played was familiar and strange. Instead of playing the familiar big band swing jazz, they "jumped" the blues. The music was swing stripped down, "simplified" and "superheated." It had a boogie-woogie piano and a hard driving back beat. Of course, people could dance to it, like they danced to the swing they were used to, but this music had a harder edge than swing by emphasizing not only the rhythm section, but also a "honking sax" that was blown hard and loud in order to produce a growling sound, as well as a "shouting" style of blues vocals. They combined the classic Dionysian aspects of the blues but added a swinging tempo. The music also had that edgy, "gutbucket" Southern flavor of the blues that emphasized the down and dirty side of life, which included sexual promiscuity and hard drinking. Sex and drinking were not celebrated in themselves, but in a context of pleasure and leisure in general as a way escape the drudgery of the daily life of being a worker in America, whether in the factory or in the field. Leroy Jones (Amiri Baraka) refers to the "classic blues," as music that is about work, or rather the escape from work. The roots of blues music go back to the slave work songs. The slaves who suffered under that brutal labor regime, sang songs while they worked the fields, and the music helped them cope with their suffering. The twin themes of suffering at work, and finding ways to escape from those conditions is the backbone of blues music. Jordan's music was about escape from work as well, but the main difference in the form of Jordan's music is that the tempo was sped up to reflect the fast pace of the city. Most of the work songs that constitute the core of classic blues came from the South where working in the cotton fields was the common referent. Speeding up the tempo of the blues was a response by musicians to the faster pace of factory work and urban life in general in the big cities. Hence the expression: "jumpin" the blues. "I made the blues jump," Jordan once said in an interview[117]. Jordan himself was from the South, so he had intimate knowledge about the oppressive working conditions in the cotton fields, and his background as a musician in the big bands during the swing era made him the right person at the right time to reflect the new realities of Southern working class Diaspora. Factory work in the North was hard, just as work in the cotton fields back home was hard, but the urban lifestyle was more intense than the slower paced customs of everyday life in the South, and Jordan's new music expressed the new lifestyle. The other major difference between the content of the classic blues and the new urban rhythm and blues was the *mood.* Rhythm and blues reflected the optimism of blacks who fled Jim Crow in the South for better opportunities in the cities up North as well as the confidence and optimism of rank and file workers in general. In short jump blues really was not so blue, since blacks were making progress toward more equality with whites, and workers in general were getting bigger piece of the pie, and enjoying a better lifestyle that was reflected in the increased emphasis on leisure and consumption.

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[117] Jordan's words appear in *Honkers and Shouters: The Golden Years of Rhythm and Blues* by Arnold Shaw (Macmillan New York 1978) p 74.

Living in the city was fun, and telling your boss and your landlord to go to hell is even more fun. Wildcat workers made an art of telling the boss where to go, and the audacity and cockiness of that attitude can be felt in the music of that time period.

Jordan's performances were a combination of music *and* entertainment, a skill he learned while he was a young man working for the Rabbit Foot Minstrels. Jordan's style was also a blue print for future generations of rock'n'rollers, including Chuck Berry, the genre breaker for the next generation of hipsters. Black and white rock and roll performers like Berry, Elvis and others, learned how to be showmen as well as musicians from studying Jordan's work. As a result of his success and combining music with entertainment Louis Jordan was very popular wherever he played; black *and* white people kicked off their shoes and jitterbugged to the jumpin' jive. Although the music that they were playing in 1940 became widely known in all the hot spots as "jump blues," it was never recognized by the music industry as such; rather, the trade magazine referred to it as "race" music, and less frequently as jazz music. In fact, the trade magazines like *Billboard* and *Variety* didn't know how to categorize Louis Jordan's music because he was among the first "cross-over" recording artists, having hits in the white audience as well as the black audience. He was the first black recording artist to dominate the charts in many genres. Rhythm and blues in general was very popular among the black and white working class, becoming the first interracial pop music. The trade magazines renamed "race" music "rhythm and blues" in 1950. By then it –jump blues - was 'officially' cut off from jazz by both the industry trade magazines like *Billboard*, but more importantly, by other jazz musicians who were looking down their noses at the new music. When Louis Jordan broke off from swing, jazz ceased to be the popular music of America.

Louis Jordan and the Tympany Five represented one of the two directions in jazz as the genre split in two during the late 30s and early 40s. As early as 1938, when Louis Jordan rocked the house in Harlem for the first time, the swing era of big band music had come to a fork in the road: one fork took the "*high*" road to bebop, the other went "*down*" the low road to jump blues and rhythm and blues, the precursor of rock'n'roll. The rhythm and blues path was forged by Louis Jordan almost single handedly. Jordan's combination of a small combo of musicians with an emphasis on shuffle rhythms, honky sax and shoutin' lyrics would be copied far and wide by such rowdy blues shouters as Wynonie Harris, Big Joe Turner, Amos Milburn, Dinah Washington, Ruth Brown, Louis Prima and Roy Brown. All of these musicians/entertainers and later generations of performers/musicians like Chuck Berry – who said, "I identify myself with Louis Jordan more than any other artist" - and Ray Charles acknowledged their debt to Jordan and credit him with laying the first tracks of rock'n'roll music.

The split in jazz had implications way beyond mere stylistic or genre differences. The split in jazz that gave birth to rhythm and blues and bebop would upend the music industry, and send shock waves throughout society by fracturing social relations along the lines of race, class, region and sexuality. The bluesy flavor that Jordan incorporated into his small jazz combos came from his father James Jordan, who had studied with W.C. Handy, the "King of Blues." W.C. Handy had helped to establish Memphis, Tennessee as the blues capital of America when he moved to Beale Street in downtown Memphis. The famous Beale Street attracted the legendary blues singers, Howlin' Wolf, and B.B. King and a generation later, young white hipsters like Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins and Johnny Cash. It was the influence of W.C. Handy that showed in Jordan's first performances in Harlem and his first recordings with Decca in 1939. Jordan's introduced a renewed emphasis on blues within jazz that eventually broke off from jazz altogether and became rhythm and blues.

Louis Jordan's first major label tour lasted until 1942, the year the American Federations called a nationwide strike on recording labels. Luckily for Jordan, he went into the studios at Decca records early in 1941 to record the blues number "I'm Gonna Move to the Outskirts of Town," which became a huge hit "crossing over" from the "race" genre to the white "pop" charts. Jordan scored a handful of hits that year that soared up the charts. "I'm Gonna Move," rose all the way to number three. Jordan became a star just before the United States went to war, and just before the AFM pulled its members out of the recording studios. The 1940s were good years for Louis Jordan.

The 1940s were also the years of the 'great migration' of African-Americans from the South to the urban centers in the North. Between the years 1916 and 1960 approximately 6 million blacks left the South and moved to urban areas both in the North in places like Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia and the West, including Kansas City and St. Louis Missouri as well as further west to Oakland and Los Angeles in California. The out migration of blacks from the South was due in part to the spectacular failure of Reconstruction, but also in part due to the demand for labor in the North as factories re-tooled for war time production and in the West as new defense related industries sprouted up after the war. The push of Jim Crow and the pull of relatively good paying jobs in the manufacturing areas up North and out West created new opportunities for African

Americans and they took advantage of them. African Americans in urban areas became a new class of consumers as well.

One regular staple of urban black consumption was the new rocking' music, rhythm and blues. In the vibrant new areas of urban neighborhoods up North, Southern blacks put their stamp on the music played in the clubs. Blues, which until then had remained a Southern vernacular, became very popular in places North and West, including Chicago and St. Louis, where it merged with swing to produce rhythm and blues. Jordan was in the middle of this transition in musical styles, and since he had already established himself at one of the major record labels – Decca - his records sold well. But Jordan was the exception. The big record companies overlooked jump blues artists who came after him. The major record labels, including Columbia, RCA Victor and Decca were slow to respond to the demand for rhythm and blues records, preferring instead to invest in the "white" markets of "popular" music like the vocalists Bing Crosby and the new kid on the block, Frank Sinatra. In addition, the majors were embroiled in a big fight with the American Federation of Musicians over the commercial use of sound recordings. The combination of the majors' lack of interest in rhythm and blues and the recording studio strike of 1942 provided a market niche for independent record labels to record and market the new music. By the late 1940s the independent labels were recording most of rhythm and blues and rock and roll.

During the war, Jordan was wildly popular at home and abroad, among the American G.I.'s as he was allowed to record during the AFM's recording ban under the auspices of the Armed Forces Radio Service and V-disc program. The 1942 strike stopped the flow of new commercial records, but the union agreed to allow limited recording by the federal government for troops fighting overseas. Listening to the latest American records was a favorite past time for American G.I.'s who were upset when the AFM called for a ban on all recordings in 1942. James Petrillo, president of the AFM was concerned that the union might lose the strike if both the public at home and the troops abroad turned against the union, so he struck a deal with the record labels and the military that would allow the production of records under the direction of the American military on condition that the records would not be used for commercial purposes, and once the war ended, the military would destroy all the recordings rather than categorize them as "surplus" made available for sale to the public[118]. The program was directed by Army sound engineer Robert Vincent – the V in "V disc" program stood for victory and Vincent -who set up shop in Manhattan recording studios and used the production and distribution facilities of the RCA Victor plant in Camden, New Jersey to move records to the troops overseas. The record companies and the AFM agreed to a waiver of all fees and royalties for the duration of the war. The first shipment, which included 1,780 boxes each containing 30 records, was shipped on October 1st, 1943, and Jordan's records were among the most popular V discs. Jordan's music appealed to black and white GI's because his songs were about working class issues, like how to pay the bills, how to fool the boss, and how to have a good time after work.

Ironically, while Jordan was given special permission by the musicians' union and the federal government to record during the recording ban, some of Jordan's most popular recordings were critical of the government's war time policies, especially FDR's double standard which called for an across the board wage freeze for American workers, a no strike pledge by labor unions, and the rationing of goods for consumers, but did nothing to curtail price increases and profits for businesses in the private sector. The wage freeze was very unpopular among American workers and Jordan tapped into the disaffected working class. After the end of the recording ban, in the years between 1943-1946, Jordan re-recorded the tracks "Ration Blues," and "Inflation Blues," for *Decca* records where he sang to Uncle Sam on behalf of the American working class,

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[118] *Official Proceedings* of the AFM, 1942

> Baby baby baby, what's wrong with Uncle Sam?
> He's cut down on my sugar, now he's messin' with my ham
> I got the ration blues, blue as I can be
> Oh me, I've got those ration blues
>
> I got to live on forty ounces, of any kind of meat
> Those forty little ounces gotta last me all the week
> I got to cut down on my jelly
> It takes sugar to make it sweet
> I'm gonna steal all your jelly baby
> And rob you of your meat
> I got the ration blues, blue as I can be
> Oh me, I've got those ration blues
>
> I like to wake up in the morning with my jelly by my side
> Since rationing started baby, you just take your stuff and hide
> They reduced my meat and sugar
> And rubber's disappearing fast
> You can't ride no more with poppa
> 'Cause Uncle Sam wants my gas
> I got the ration blues, blue as I can be
> Oh me, I've got those ration blues[119]

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[119] "Ration Blues," from *Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five: 1941-1943* (France Classics Records 1994).

Jordan had touched a nerve in the both the urban African American community and the American working class in general. During the war, both African Americans living in the urban centers and blue collar rank and file union members, white and black, were becoming frustrated with the austerity programs implemented by the Roosevelt administration during the war. In addition, African American GIs were fed up with fighting a war abroad to "save democracy," while back home they continued to live with the degradation and discrimination of Jim Crow. Back in the States, race riots erupted on the West coast and in Harlem. In Los Angeles, the "Zoot Suit" riot erupted when a group of white sailors attacked a group of Mexican Americans, and in Harlem, when the military forced New York City to shut down the Savoy Ballroom. In New York, the official story was that the military wanted the popular night spot closed because soldiers had contracted VD there, but everyone knew that the real reason was that whites and blacks were "mixing" there, and going home together. In the 1940s, the white power structure in America didn't tolerate interracial relationships, and the military discouraged it as well. The closing of the Savoy sparked a riot in Harlem that foreshadowed the urban race riots of the 1960s. In both cases, the Zoot Suit riot in LA, and the riot that ensued after the closing of the Savoy in Harlem were, in part, examples of the tensions created by the new interracial working class culture of the city and the tension was expressed in the new music: rhythm and blues.

The Zoot Suit was a symbol of both African-American and Chicano/a refusal to abide by Jim Crow, as well as the working class affirmation of leisure over work[120]. Zoot suits were oversized suits, with big shoulder pads, and big baggy pants. The baggier the pants and the more outrageous the color of the suit the more it signified individuality and prestige, two things sorely lacking while at work on the assembly line in the factory. Zoot suits and the culture that spawned them emphasized the construction of identity *outside* of the work place. Factory work was alienating, but life after work in the night clubs provided workers with an opportunity to create themselves anew, and the best way to signify to others what you were all about was through the threads your wore and the kind of music you listened to and perhaps most important, how well you could dance. Of course, zoot suits were expensive, and it took time to enjoy life in the city, which meant workers had to fight for bigger paychecks to pay for things like zoot suits as well as for less time at work in order to have more free time for pleasure and identity making activities[121].

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[120] See Robin Kelley, "The Riddle of the Zoot," in *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York, The Free Press, 1996).

Rhythm and blues and rock'n'roll music was an integral part, if not the principle vehicle of this new interracial working class culture of pretension and refusal that emerged during the war. When Louis Jordan recorded his smash hit "inflation blues" in 1946 – a song about the injustice of government freezes on wage increases while private businesses were allowed to raise prices on their goods - workers all across the U.S. were on strike over the very same issues that Jordan was singing about. Louis Jordan cut the right record at the right time. In "Inflation Blues" Jordan sings:

> Now listen mister President and all you Congressman too,
> You've got me all frustrated and I don't know what to do,
> I'm trying to make a dollar and can't even save a cent,
> It takes all my money just to eat and pay my rent,
> That's why I got the blues, got those inflation blues…

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[121] *Labor's War at Home*, Lichtenstien.

> I'm not one of those high-brows, I'm average Joe to you
> I came up eatin' cornbread, candied yams and chicken stew
> Now you take that paper dollar, it's only that in name,
> The way that paper bucket shrunk, it's a low down dirty shame,
> I got the blues, got those inflation blues
> Hey Prez, please cut the price of sugar so I can make my coffee sweet,
> I like to smear some butter on my bread; you know I like my meat,
> When you started rationing you really played the game,
> Things are going up and up but my check remains the same[122].

The content of Jordan's lyrics and the form of the music, which included a hard, driving back beat behind Jordan's "shouting," and his growling, honking saxophone emphasized aspects of life that mainstream "pop" music shied away from. Pop singers, especially white pop singers who performed tunes written by the Tin Pan Alley songwriters were not singing songs about controversial subjects, nor was the structure or form of the songs in any way threatening. On the contrary, mainstream pop songs coming out of Tin Pan Alley painted a rosy picture of American life devoid of conflict or tension, whether racial tensions or class conflict. The "happy" formula that Tin Pan Alley songwriters developed in the 1920s had changed very little by the 1940s, and their music was more and more out of touch with working class life in the big cities. It was rhythm and blues music that told the truth about racial tensions and class conflict in America during the 1940s. In addition to singing about the problems of inflation, mean landlords and lousy working conditions, Jordan's songs were also about the affirmation of newly created leisure spaces of the city. He sang about late night parties, conflicts between cops and partygoers, and perhaps most important for this discussion, problems paying the bills, and labor strife between workers and capitalists. These were precisely the topics shunned by mainstream white "popular" artists of the day like the Benny Goodman band that included crooners like Bing Crosby as front men. Bing Crosby was a huge star and the Goodman band had many big hits with Crosby out front of his band, but their songs and music never appealed to the urban working class in the same way as Louis Jordan and the generation of rhythm and blues artists that followed him.

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[122] The lyrics appear in Louis Jordan, "Inflation Blues," from *Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five 1946-1947* (Classics Records, France).

In terms of the music itself, Jordan's presence out front on sax and vocals was essential to the break from big band swing, because he provided the appropriate comedic attitude that accompanied the "shouting" style of blues vocals that lit up the room with lyrics that were full of swagger and bravado. Jordan also made use of the call and response techniques that go way back in the history of African American music to the work songs of field slaves in antebellum America, where the lead singer would call out lyrics and receive a responding set of lyrics from other field slaves. Many of Jordan's tunes were performed in story telling modes in the call and response style. In addition to the form of call and response, the content of jump blues music also has roots in the work songs of field slaves. The lyrics of jump blues music, being rooted in the working class, emphasized resistance to work and pursuit of leisure. Indeed, if it can be said that blues music has an "essence" or "zeitgeist," such and essence can be found in the struggle of coping with backbreaking work and grinding poverty. The history of country blues, or classic blues is rooted in the experience of suffering. According the legendary electric bluesman Howlin' Wolf,

> Well I was broke when I was born, that's why I grew up howlin'. We talk about the life of human beings [in our music], how they live. A lot of people wonder

> what the blues is, and I'm gonna tell you. When you ain't got no money you got the blues…A lot of people holler, 'well I don't like the blues,' but when you ain't got no money to pay the rent and when you can't buy you no food you damn sure got the blues. When you ain't got no money you got the blues cuz you're thinkin' evil… If you gettin' everything you need [and more] you don't have no right to worry about nothin. But when you don't got nothin, you got to worry about something, and that's when the blues comes in. You say, 'I don't have this and I don't have that.' When you look around and you see these other people have this and they have that, and in your heart you feel like you're nobody, then you got the blues[123].

The blues is a set of feelings produced by a stark existence and music, in this case country blues, is made in order to cope with those bad feelings. Willie Dixon claimed blues music "relaxes the mind about bad feelings." Memphis Slim, another legendary electric bluesman from Wolf's and Dixon's cohort put a slightly different spin on the meaning of the blues. For Slim, in addition to being about coping with identity crises that follow from abject poverty, the blues is also about resistance and fighting back. "The blues goes back to slavery," according to Slim. "When slaves wanted to say things that they couldn't say, that would get them in trouble, or [when they wanted to] *get back at the boss*, they would sing [emphasis mine][124]." Getting back at your boss, indeed. That's the spiritual core of rock and roll music too, and that spirit helps explain the structural similarities country blues music and rock and roll music. Getting back at the boss, as well as getting back at the myriad of authoritative figures that working class people face in the their everyday lives is a main staple of blues, jump blues and rock and roll. Both

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[123] Howlin' Wolf's account appears in the video documentary, *The Howlin' Wolf Story*, directed by Don McGlynn, Produced by Joe Lauro (New York Blue Sea Productions 2003)

[124] Ibid.

Wolf's and Slim's definition of the meaning of the blues can be fond in rock and roll, but the mood of the blues changed after the war, and after it was electrified.

The older, sad mood of the country, or "classic" blues changed with the development of jump blues in the late 1940s, because working class pretensions injected a more affirmative, positive outlook on life into the music. Life in the city provided a better material existence for workers who fled the fields of the South, as Howlin' Wolf himself said after he moved from Mississippi to Chicago in order to begin a recording career at *Chess* records as well as to transform the culture of Chicago. Workers could reasonably expect a bigger paycheck from a job in the city, and more importantly, an exciting new life in the cosmopolitan atmosphere provided by the big city. The newer jump blues music of the late 1940s was also an escape, a way of coping with the backbreaking, alienating work, whether in the field or in the factory. But when you "jump" the blues, then you're not so sad, at least not in the way that Howlin' describes in the quote above where he says you look at yourself and you think you're nobody. On the contrary, jump blues was celebratory and Dionysian to the core. Jordan said that "when you come to hear Louis Jordan, you'd hear things that make you forget what you'd had to do the day before and just have a good time, a great time[125]." In the spirit of escaping work, one of Jordan's big hits was "Let the Good Times Roll," a song with obvious connotations for workers. "Let the Good Times Roll," was written in 1946 the same year that workers were on general strikes all across America. The lyrics to "Let the Good Times Roll" go like this:

> Hey, everybody, let's have some fun
> You only live but once

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[125] Jordan (Classics)

And when you're dead you're done, so

Let the good times roll, let the good times roll
I don't care if you're young or old
Get together, let the good times roll

Don't sit there mumblin', and talkin' trash
If you wanna have a ball
You gotta go out and spend some cash, and
Let the good times roll, let the good times roll
I don't care if you're young or old
Get together, let the good times roll

Hey Mr. landlord, lock up all the doors
When the police comes around
Just tell 'em that the joint is closed
Let the good times roll, let the good times roll
I don't care if you're young or old
Get together, let the good times roll

Hey tell everybody
Mr. Jordan's in town
I got a dollar and a quarter
Just rarin' to clown
But don't let nobody play me cheap
I got fifty cents more that i'm gonna keep, so

Let the good times roll, let the good times roll
I don't care if you're young or old
Get together, let the good times roll

No matter whether rainy weather
Birds of a feather gotta stick together
So get yourself under control

> Go out and get together and let the good times roll[126]

These were good times indeed. The bravado of Jordan's lyrics, where he announces that he's come to town to spend money have a have good time, and make sure everyone else at the club had a good time too, reflects the zeitgeist of the times, the substance of which was working class pretension. Workers were having a great time living in the city and nobody was going to get in their way of letting the good times roll, not the boss, not the landlord and not even the police! Such cockiness and bravado in rhythm and blues music mirrored the outrageous audacity of bombastic workers who could tell their bosses and their government where to go. Spending money, *lots* of money meant that workers were not embracing the bourgeois norm of delayed gratification and sacrifice. Workers saw how the war was used as an excuse to force false austerity on the working class, and they saw through the ideology of delayed gratification and sacrifice as still more attempts by the bourgeoisie to impose austerity on workers, while capitalists consumed most of the wealth produced by economic growth. It was the workers turn to rock and roll.

The term "rock and roll" comes from this atmosphere of working class pretensions and it was a regular feature that appeared in most rhythm and blues songs. Decades before rock and roll became the music industry's name for a kind of music, rock and roll were terms used in the every day life of the urban working class, particularly the black working class. In rhythm and blues songs, "rock and roll" sometimes refers to sexual intercourse, as in "my baby rocked and rolled me all night long," and sometimes it refers to having a good time, as in it was a "rockin'" good time. A rockin' good time usually ended up in fisticuffs, as in the party was "rockin'" so much, which was a result of the scuffling and shuffling between party goers and the police. It could also mean that the “scufflin’” and “shufflin’” was so intense that it made the house or nightclub shake or “rock” back and forth. Such was the content of Louis Jordan’s smash hit, “Saturday Night Fish Fry.” Written in 1949, “Saturday Night Fish Fry,” is a rocking tune with a boogie-woogie piano, a walking bass line, heavy back beat and a very funny story about rowdy party goers, who end up fighting with the police and going to jail. In addition to being one of the first rhythm and blues tunes to feature the electric guitar out front, it was also one of the first tunes that emphasized the term “rockin’” in the chorus.

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[126] "Let the Good Times Roll," appears on *The Best of Louis Jordan,* (New York MCA Records 1975).

> Now, if you've ever been down to New Orleans
> Then you can understand just what I mean,
> Now all through the week it's quiet as a mouse,
> But on Saturday night, they go from house to house;
> You don't have to pay the usual admission
> If you're a cook or a waiter or a good musician.
> So if you happen to be just passin' by
> Stop in at the Saturday night fish fry!
>
> It was rockin'! It was rockin'!
> You never seen such scufflin' and shufflin' till the break of dawn!
> It was rockin'! It was rockin'!
> You never seen such scufflin' and shufflin' till the break of dawn!
>
> Now, my buddy and me was on the main stem,
> Foolin' around, just me and him,
> We decided we could use a little something to eat,
> So we went to a house on Rampart Street;
> We knocked on the door and it opened with ease,
> And a loose little miss said, "Come in please,"
> And before we could bat an eye,

We were right in the middle of a big fish fry!

It was rockin'! It was rockin'!
You never seen such scufflin' and shufflin' till the break of dawn!
It was rockin'! It was rockin'!
You never seen such scufflin' and shufflin' till the break of dawn!

Now the folks was havin' the time of their life,
And Sam was jivin' Jimmy's wife,
And over in the corner was a beat-up grand
Being played by a big, fat piano man!
Some of the chicks wore expensive frocks,
Some of them had on bobby socks,
But everybody was nice and high
At this particular Saturday night fish fry!

It was rockin'! It was rockin'!
You never seen such scufflin' and shufflin' till the break of dawn!
It was rockin'! It was rockin'!
You never seen such scufflin' and shufflin' till the break of dawn!

Now, my buddy and me, we fell right in,
And we hollered, "Let the joy begin!"
Now, we figured this was a good place to play,
'Cause the party was already underway;
But all of a sudden the lights went low,
And everybody made straight for the front door,
Man, I was so scared I didn't know where to go,
I stood right there, then I fell on the floor!

It was rockin'! It was rockin'!
You never seen such scufflin' and shufflin' till the break of dawn!
It was rockin'! It was rockin'!
You never seen such scufflin' and shufflin' till the break of dawn!

Now, the women was screamin' and jumpin' and yellin',
The bottles was flyin' and the fish was smellin';
And way up above all the noise they made,
Somebody hollered, "Better get out of here; this is a raid!"
Now, I didn't know we was breakin' the law,
But somebody reached up and hit me on the jaw,
They had us blocked off from the front and the back,
And they was puttin' 'em in the wagon like potatoes in a sack.

It was rockin'! It was rockin'!
You never seen such scufflin' and shufflin' till the break of dawn!
It was rockin'! It was rockin'!
You never seen such scufflin' and shufflin' till the break of dawn!

I knew I could get away if I had a chance,
But I was shakin' like I had the St. Vitus dance,
Now, I tried to crawl under a bathtub,
When the policeman said, "Where you goin' there, bub?"
Now, they got us out of there like a house on fire,
Put us all in that Black Maria,
Now, they might have missed a pitiful few,
But they got both me and my buddy, too!

It was rockin'! It was rockin'!
You never seen such scufflin' and shufflin' till the break of dawn!
It was rockin'! It was rockin'!
You never seen such scufflin' and shufflin' till the break of dawn!

We headed for jail in a dazed condition,
They booked each one of us on suspicion;
Now my chick came down and went for my bail,
And finally got me out of that rotten jail;
Now, if you ever want to get a fist in your eye,

Just mention a Saturday night fish fry!
I don't care how many fish in the sea,
But don't ever mention a fish to me!

It was rockin'! It was rockin'!
You never seen such scufflin' and shufflin' till the break of dawn!
It was rockin'! It was rockin'!
You never seen such scufflin' and shufflin' till the break of dawn!

[Spoken]

Give me one of them there fish sandwiches!
Get away from there, boy!
Yowza![127]

In mainstream, white, middle class "popular" music of the late 1940s, as well as in jazz, you would never hear a tune bragging about going to a party to get drunk, get in a fight with the police and end up in jail. On the contrary, mainstream, so-called "popular" music, which came from Tin Pan Alley, portrayed a more "wholesome" image of everyday life in America, but in urban America the middle class suburban norms did not apply. In fact, "popular" music at that time was only popular for the white middle class. That stuff never made it into the jukeboxes or onto the stage of a working class juke-joint/tavern.

Louis Jordan created the mold for rock and roll, and his music appealed to the next generation of rock and rollers, who sprang organically from the urban working class after the war. After Louis Jordan, the next group of influential jump blues musicians that sprang up out the working class culture of pretension, included most importantly the

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[127] Ibid.,

Texan Amos Milburn, a former chef in the Navy during the war, Big Joe Turner, a bartender from Kansas City, Wynonie Harris from Los Angeles, T-Bone Walker, also from Texas, and Hank Williams who straddled the two generations of musicians.

While Louis Jordan was the voice of workers during the war, it was Wynonie Harris, more than any other rock and roller, who embodied the audacity of working class pretensions after the war, during the waves of wildcat strikes of 1945-1946 and beyond. Harris had made a name for himself as an outrageous entertainer on the West coast during the war. He got his start in Kansas City in the late 1930s, where he used to hang out with the other great blues shouter from that era, Big Joe Turner. Big Joe worked as a bartender, in Kansas City, and it gave Wynonie and him an opportunity to learn from the masters of the swing era. Turner and Harris were in Kansas City when Count Basie and Charlie Parker were rocking that town, and they learned the tricks of the trade from studying Count Basie in particular. When the scene in Kansas City waned, Harris made his way out to Los Angeles during the war and became a star performer in his own right. Harris was part of the labor migration to Los Angeles in search of factory work in the burgeoning defense industry, and he soon found that he had an audience for his music. A recording career was sure thing for Harris after he established his reputation in Los Angeles as one of the most popular performers on the West Coast.

Harris became a star recording artist in the mid to late 1940s, and he had many big hits over the span of almost ten years for *King* records, which was based in Cincinnati, Ohio. Most importantly, he cut the mold for the brash, rowdy, cocky, good-looking rock star. He had attractive bluish green eyes a tall, thin build, a pencil thin mustache an irresistible smile, a booming voice, the most impeccable threads, and a commanding presence. Harris was by far the most outrageous of the blues shouters from the late 1940s. Not only was the content of his songs way out on the edge; he had the persona to match the music. Harris had a notorious reputation as a hard drinker and big spender, and he always took over the center of attention wherever he went. He was found of announcing to the patrons of his favorite clubs as he entered, “Mr. Blues is back in town, and I have enough money to air-condition Hell!” Indeed, hell was the appropriate metaphor for the self-named Mr. Blues. Harris’ reputation for revelry would make the Prince of Darkness himself blush from embarrassment. Harris rose to fame after a string of hits in 1946-1947 the peak years of working class pretensions in America, the most important of which was “Good Rockin’ Tonight,” a classic record from that era.

Harris cut the record “Good Rockin’ Tonight,” in 1947, which some rock historians consider to be the first rock and roll record[128]. “Good Rockin’ Tonight,” was written and recorded first by Roy Brown, but it was Harris’ version that is seen by some rock historians to signal the sea change in popular music, because unlike Brown, Wynonie Harris’ version is full of electricity. When you put “the needle on the vinyl,” Harris practically leaps off the record into your living room. The pounding boogie-woogie piano and the walking bass line blend together perfectly with the hard driving back beat of the drums, and Harris shouts over a growling trumpet and honking saxophone, “have your heard the news? There’s good rockin’ tonight!” It’s nearly impossible not to dance with the record, since it has such a genuinely jubilant feeling to it. When you play the record, it’s as if you’re in a club somewhere participating in the performance and creating the rowdy atmosphere. Harris’ records, perhaps better than all the other recording artists from the jump blues era perfected the function of blues music, which according to novelist Albert Murray, "is not only to drive the blues away and hold them at bay at least for the time being, but also to evoke an ambiance of Dionysian revelry.[129]" "Ambiance of Dionysian revelry:" is the perfect way to describe Harris' live performances *as well as* his recordings, which are nothing if not Dionysian. Wynonie Harris, like Louis Jordan before him tapped into the Dionysian zeitgeist of the times, and it seems like he knew as much, when he asks rhetorically, "have you heard the news?" It's hard to imagine Harris' music being possible at any other time in American history. All the years of suffering and sacrifice during the war had imposed a repressive sublimation on the American working class, and at war's end, the collective libido of the working class exploded through the records and performances jump blues music, especially Harris'. When you listen to Wynonie Harris shouting over the pounding piano, the noisy, honking saxophone, the growling trumpet and hard driving bass drum you can't help but kick off your shoes. The music really is irresistible, and Harris' seems to know it. You can imagine that he was well aware that he had his audience under a spell. Decades before Mick Jagger announced to the world that he was Beelzebub in the Rolling Stones classic recording of "Sympathy for the Devil," Wynonie Harris was causing serious mischief and Dionysian mayhem among the generation of post-War GIs. In "Good Rockin' Tonight," Harris' uses the term "rockin'" in all its connotations: a rocking good time, the house is rocking from all the dancing and somewhere in the house, somebody is surely rock and rolling with their partner. Many of his songs include a story about promiscuity, as well they should.

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[128] See James Miller, *Flowers in the Dustbin: the Rise of Rock and Roll 1947-1977* (Simon & Schuster, New York 1999)

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[129] Albert Murray's quote appears in Miller, p 25.

Harris cut “Good Rockin’ Tonight,” for *King* records, based in Cincinnati, Ohio. *King* records was one of the key independent record labels of the 1940s that filled the void left by the major record labels that had turned a collective deaf ear to rhythm and blues music. All of Harris’ recordings cut for *King* records helped to popularize the terms “rock and roll” in popular music. In addition to “Good Rockin’ Tonight,” Harris cut two tunes in 1949 that helped bring the term “rock” to center stage in popular music. First, was a tune that he wrote himself called, “All She Wants to Do is Rock,” and the second single was “I Like My Baby’s Pudding.” Both records were not so subtle tributes to the pleasures of carnal indulgences, but perhaps the one record that went over the top with sexual double entendres was “Keep on Churnin’” also on *King* records, cut in 1952. “Keep on churnin’ til the butter comes,” is the main refrain on the record, followed by “wipe off the paddle and churn some more.” With double entendres like these, it’s no wonder the major record labels that catered to white, middle class America wouldn’t touch Wynonie Harris with a ten-foot pole. The terms rock and roll, had long been in use in the African American community, but the jump blues musicians like Harris made it a mainstay in post-War, urban working class culture.

Harris’ records are still available on the *King* label today as well as on compilations, and on some of the compilations there are warnings of “explicit lyrics,” although Harris never actually cursed on any of his records. He didn’t have to because he was more than raunchy with the use of double entendres and narratives of outrageous parties. In all of his records, Harris bragged about being a good lover, a hard drinker and tough brawler. On “Good Morning Judge,” cut in 1950 he sings about getting busted for dating a 15 year-old girl who just so happened to be the daughter of a policeman. Oops.

A record like that would raise some eyebrows even today, to say nothing of the so-called "Leave It to Beaver" white, middle class climate of the 1950s. On "Quiet Whiskey," co-written by Harris and cut in 1953, Harris sings about all hell breaking loose after a group of friends share bottles of whiskey, gin and wine. In the tune, Harris and his friends, including the one who seduces the "policeman's wife," all end up in jail after the neighbors call the police to shut down the rowdy party. They try and resist the police, but alas, end up in jail.

"Good Rockin' Tonight" solidified Harris' place in the rock and roll hall of fame. In June of 1948 *Billboard* magazine listed "Good Rockin' Tonight," as both the "best selling" race record, and "most played" race record in jukeboxes. While Harris' version of "Good Rockin' Tonight" was a huge hit in the so-called "race" jukeboxes across American, and although Harris was marketed as a black entertainer, his music was eventually heard by white kids via radio, and soon white kids were crossing the tracks to the black side of town to buy a copy of "Good Rockin' Tonight." As long as Wynonie Harris and the other blues shouters and rhythm and blues performers were marketed for an African American audience, their music remained more or less uncontroversial. But beginning in the early 1950s Southern working class white kids who tuned into radio stations like WDIA in Memphis Tennessee got turned on to rhythm and blues music. In fact, one Elvis Presley's first big hit records was a cover version of "Good Rockin' Tonight." It was just a few short years until rhythm and blues and rock and roll reached a middle class white audience, and once that happened conservative forces in society led a backlash against the music. I discuss that issue in more detail in the next chapter.

In addition to the blues shouters like Wynonie Harris and Big Joe Turner, the other key figures in the emergence of rock and roll in the late 1940s were Amos Milburn the pianist singer/songwriter from Texas, the remarkable blues guitarist singer/songwriter T-Bone Walker, also from Texas and Hank Williams guitarist singer/songwriter from Alabama. Milburn grew up in Texas, and during World War II, he joined the Navy and worked as a chef. When he got out of the Navy he played gigs in San Francisco where he created a buzz for his music. Milburn eventually grabbed the attention of Modern records and Aladdin records, both based in Los Angeles and he cut several classic singles for the two labels including "One Scotch, One Bourbon, One Beer," recorded in 1947 and later made into smash hit cover version for George Thorogood in the early 1980s. Like Harris, Milburn's records were nasty, although Milburn's singing style was tame compared to Harris, since Milburn did not sing in the shouting style, but preferred a more mellow smooth style of singing. Milburn's style would become mainstream with Fats Domino, who in many ways is a carbon copy of Milburn. One of Milburn's first hits was "After Midnight," recorded in 1946. On that record Milburn sings about his extraordinarily horny girlfriend and their wild sex life. One of the lines goes, "she said 'I've been drinking moonshine whiskey, and anything I do tonight is alright…she said thrill me, thrill me daddy, thrill me like you did the night before." Milburn's most outrageous record is "Walking Blues," where he sings about raising women from the dead by shaking his cock at their corpses. "Took my gal to the graveyard," sings Milburn in "Walking Blues," "I thought she was dead, then I shook this Jelly Roll at her and she raised her head. Now she's walkin', yeah she kept on walkin." In "Let's Rock a While," cut in 1951, he sings about the importance of making time for sex: let's _ _ ck a while."

Like Wynonie Harris, lyrics like Milburn's became controversial when the media and conservative politicians led a backlash against rock and roll, but before middle class white kids got turned on to rhythm and blues, nobody made a fuss about Amos Milburn or Wynonie Harris. In the so-called race market, Milburn was a big star. Milburn's records were best sellers in the race market and among most frequently played in "race" jukeboxes. He was one of the most popular performers in Texas and all over the South.

The other key figure to come out of the blues and rhythm and blues era was T-Bone Walker. T-bone, like Amos Milburn, was closer to the classic blues than the "shouting" rhythm and blues style of Wynonie Harris and Big Joe Turner, but he is a key figure in the history of rock and roll, because his astonishing guitar work made modern rock and roll possible. Way before Chuck Berry was doing his duck walk across the stage and eons before Jimi Hendrix was playing guitar with his teeth, T-Bone Walker was playing electric guitar behind his head and jumping up in the air with his guitar, landing on the ground in the splits, all the while in the midst of an intricate guitar solo. T-Bone was a close friend of, and from the same generation of Charlie Christian, the guitarist who played in the Benny Goodman band. Together with Christian, Walker demonstrated the enormous potential of the electric guitar. In the jazz idiom before Christian and Walker, guitar was scene as primarily a rhythm instrument, and in the traditional blues, guitar was largely understood as an acoustic instrument. When Les Paul perfected the electric guitar, everything changed. The guitar became a lead instrument, thanks to T-Bone Walker, who showed what could be done by playing single notes rather than chords, as was typical for rhythm guitar. Suddenly, with T-Bone, the guitar rivaled the saxophone as the preferred instrument for the skilled instrumental soloist. T-Bone

Walker's biggest hit was "Call It Stormy Monday," perhaps the most important blues guitar record ever cut. It's been covered countless times by generation after generation of rock and roll stars since Walker first cut the record in 1947. The guitar solo in "Stormy Monday," literally changed the map, redefining what was possible on and with the guitar.

Apart from the classic licks played masterfully by Walker, the song is famous for its lyrics. The lyrical refrain of the song is about work, or rather the escape from work. Monday is called "stormy" because it's the beginning of the workweek, and many workers begin the workweek with a hangover from the night before: hence, "stormy" Monday. Stormy also refers to the juxtaposition of the paradise of the weekend to the bad weather endured during the workweek. Back in the day, during the 19th century when the workweek was six days long, workers referred to Monday as "Saint" Monday, because they often stayed home, or came in to work very late because they were recovering from a hangover from the night before. They called it "Saint" Monday, because it was on unofficial holiday of sorts, because before the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which instituted the 40-hour workweek, there was no weekend, as we now know it. Sunday was the only day off for more than a century until the labor movement finally won (officially) the two-day weekend during the 1930s when it was written into law during the New Deal. So, before the official two-day weekend that we now enjoy, workers took a second day unofficially and without permission from the boss, and they called that day "Saint Monday." Walker's famous tune signifies the history and tradition of "Saint Monday." Walker sings,

> They call it stormy Monday,
> But Tuesday's just as bad.

> Yes, the call it stormy Monday,
> But Tuesday’s just as bad.
> Wednesday’s worse, and Thursday’s also sad.
> Yes, the eagle flies on Friday and Saturday I go out to play,
> Yes, the eagle flies on Friday, and Saturday I go out to play…
> They call it stormy Monday[130].

While workers won an extra day off in the 1930s, it was still the case, as T-Bone Walker makes clear, that Monday through Friday morning remains sheer misery. After all, what gives somebody the blues in the first place is work; lousy low-paying work in particular is the root cause of the blues. Friday night, however, the eagle flies! The anti-work/pro-leisure theme from “Stormy Monday,” is the heart and soul the classic or traditional blues and it also shaped much of the culture of rhythm and blues in the late 1940s, although the environment of working class pretensions in the 1940s significantly altered the content of blues music and made the blues “jump.” In other words, “jump” blues is the other side of the coin from traditional blues. Old school or traditional blues is about the suffering produced by work, whereas jump blues or rhythm and blues is about the affirmation of leisure. When workers were at their peak of power in the 1940s, people were jumping with joy and partaking in the Dionysian side of life while times were good. Working class pretensions made the blues jump. You can still find both sides of blues music in modern rock and roll today fifty years later.

Another key figure in the development of rock and roll music was Hank Williams. Williams was a country music, or “hillbilly” recording artist, and his music was the most influential music from the country genre that contributed to the development of rock and roll in the 1950s. Williams was the biggest country music star to emerge out of Nashiville. Between 1948-1953 Williams had eleven records that sold more than a million copies each. He was especially influential for the cohort of *Sun* records musicians from Memphis Tennessee that included Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis and Johnny Cash. Sam Phillips, the owner of *Sun* records also recorded black musicians, years before he recorded Elvis and his cohort, including B.B. King, Howlin' Wolf, Rufus Thomas and Little Junior Parker and the Blue Flames. Elvis and his cohort were well versed in both country, or hillbilly music and rhythm and blues, since Memphis was such a culturally eclectic environment. In spite of segregation in public spaces like stores and restaurants that still existed in the Jim Crow South in the early 1950s working class black kids in Memphis lived in close proximity and were exposed to all kinds of working class music. Elvis and Perkins were big fans of rhythm and blues artists like Big Bill Broonzy and Arthur Crudup as well as hillbilly artists like Hank Williams and Jimmy Rodgers. When Elvis, Perkins and their cohort combined hillbilly music with the rhythm and blues, both of which they grew up with in Memphis, they called it "rockabilly." More than any other hillbilly-recording artist, it was Hank Williams who contributed to the style Carl Perkins and Elvis. Like the rhythm and blues musicians from his generation, Hank Williams was part of the great migration of workers to war production centers during the Second World War. Williams found work during the war as a welder in shipyard in Mobile, Alabama for the Alabama Drydock and Shipbuilding Company, which at the time was on the government dole manufacturing ships for the war. And, just as was the case with the rhythm and blues musicians of his era, Hank Williams found an eager audience for his music. But unlike the Dionysian, affirmative content of most jump blues music, many of Hank Williams tunes were sad, dark songs about the pain and suffering that come from hard work at low pay. Williams once said that in order to understand his music, you had to have an intimate knowledge of hard work, the brutality of hard work[131]. One of Williams' darkest songs is "I'll Never Get Out of this World Alive," where Williams (2002) sings:

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[130] T-Bone Walker’s “Stormy Monday,” appears *T-Bone Blues* (Atlantic Records 1988)

> Ev'rything's agin' me and it's got me down
> If I jumped in the river I would prob'ly drown
> No matter how I struggle and strive
> I'll never get out of this world alive.
>
> These shabby shoes I'm wearin' all the time
> Are full of holes and nails
> And brother if I stepped on a worn out dime
> I bet a nickel I could tell you if it was heads or tails.

Williams' father was an itinerant laborer, and William's childhood experiences were filled with hard times, as his father sometimes went long stretches of time without work. As a child, Williams suffered from malnutrition and a severe case of hookworm damaged his eyesight. As a young man he suffered a serious accident while trying out for a rodeo that caused a serious back injury that gave him problems for the rest of his life. Like other poor kids from his generation, Hank Williams viewed entertainment, whether as a rodeo star or as a country music star as the only way out of a life of grinding poverty and backbreaking low wage jobs. The pain and suffering Williams experienced as the child of a poor working class Southern family is expressed in his music.

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[131] For an excellent reading of Hank Williams music, see George Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight*, pp. 303-334.

Williams was exposed to blues and rhythm and blues music while he worked as a welder during the war and his music was deeply influenced by the blues. Williams used traditional hillbilly instrumentation and arrangements in his music, including steel guitar, fiddles and the four line, rhymed couplet verses that were typical in country music, but he also sang in falsetto style and used call and response techniques that he learned from listening to the blues. While many of his songs portrayed a feeling of loneliness and alienation that accompanied his personal life, other songs were more upbeat tunes that celebrated leisure and emphasized the value of immediate pleasure over delayed gratification. The best example of Williams singing in the spirit of working class pretension is “Honky Tonkin,”” a song about stepping out on the town and spending lots of money. The song holds its own with any of the rowdy jump blues tunes of the same era. Williams (2002) sings:

> When you are sad and lonely and have no place to go
> Call me up, sweet baby, and bring along some dough
> And we'll go honky tonkin', honky tonkin'
> Honky tonkin', honey baby
> We'll go honky tonkin' 'round this town.
>
> When you and your baby have a fallin' out
> Just call me up sweet mama and we'll go steppin' out
> And we'll go honky tonkin', honky tonkin'
> Honky tonkin', honey baby
> We'll go honky tonkin' 'round this town.
>
> We're goin' to the city - to the city fair
> If you go to the city then you will find me there
> And we'll go honky tonkin', honky tonkin'
> Honky tonkin', honey baby
> We'll go honky tonkin' 'round this town.

And then there's "Settin' the Woods on Fire," Williams' most Dionysian tune of all, and if that's not obvious in the title, then the lyrics are clear about Williams' intentions: spend lots of money and have as much fun as possible. In "Settin' the Woods on Fire," Williams (2002) sings:

> Comb your hair and paint and powder, you act proud and I'll act prouder
> You sing loud and I'll sing louder, tonight we're settin' the woods on fire
> You're my gal and I'm your feller, dress up in your frock of yeller
> I'll look swell but you'll look sweller, settin' the woods on fire
> We'll take in all the honky tonks tonight we're having fun
> We'll show the folks a brand new dance that never has been done
> I don't care who thinks we're silly, you'll be daffy and I'll be dilly
> We'll order up two bowls of chili, settin' the woods on fire
>
> I'll gas up my hot rod stoker, we'll get hotter than a poker
> You'll be broke but I'll be broker, tonight we're settin' the woods on fire
> We'll sit close to one another, up our street and down the other
> Tonight we'll have ball oh brother, settin' the woods on fire
> We'll put aside a little time to fix a flat or two
> My trey and tubes are doin' fine but the air is showin' through
> You clap hands and I'll start howlin', we'll do all the law's allowin'
> Tomorrow I'll be right back plowin', settin' the woods on fire

The key lines in "Settin' the Woods on Fire," that express working class pretensions are the lines about acting proud, competing to see who can spend the most money, and not caring what anyone thinks about how they look; indeed looking as silly as possible is the point! Williams' emphasis on spending as much money as possible and pushing the law to the limit perfectly expresses the zeitgeist of post-War working class pretensions. Williams, Wynonie Harris, Amos Milburn and their cohort of rockers were able to be so pretentious in part because they knew that they had leverage over the power structure in America, since their generation had performed their “patriotic” duty by sacrificing their lives for the war effort, and god be damned if anyone was going to stop them from enjoying every moment of life once the war was over. The soldiers who returned home from the horrors of war, and the factory workers who worked extra long hours for no increase in pay could not be contained in the late forties. They took advantage of their right to de-sublimate, and nobody was going to stop them from living life to the fullest. You can hear these sentiments in Williams’ tune “Rockin Chair Money,” from 1947, a song that became an anthem for working class servicemen and servicewomen returning from the war. Williams sings:

> Now I got rockin' chair money
> But I got it the hard, hard way
> I fought in every battle
> From the start to the VJ day
> And now I'll rock...yeah rock...
> Oh baby rock...rock on down the line
>
> Now some folks seem to be jealous
> Some don't seem to care
> But I got rockin' chair money, honey
> To rock on away from here
> Cause I love to rock...yeah rock...
> Baby, rock, rock on down the line…
>
> I'll soon get my big check, baby
> And then we'll have some fun
> This rockin' chair money, honey
> Is better than totin' a gun
> Cause I love to rock, yeah rock

Baby, rock, let's rock on down the line

Now, honey, let's go honky tonkin'
Let's honky tonk all night
Let's lollygag and smooch and love
and do it all up right
Cause I love to rock, yeah rock
Baby, rock, let's rock on down the line

Like Louis Jordan, and Wynonie Harris, Williams was among the first recording artists to popularize the term “rock.” Rockin’ chair money refers to the G.I. Bill, and the improving lifestyles afforded by soldiers who took advantage of government programs to buy a house, attend school, secure access to healthcare etc, but rockin’ also means having good time and going out to party and spend some of that money from the G.I. Bill. Williams use the hillbilly slang words “honky tonkin’” and the blues slang word “rockin’” interchangeably to describe the Dionysian side of life. In “Rockin’ Chair Money,” Williams says that after he gets his big check he’s going to “lollygag” and “smooch,” which is another way of saying, “rockin’.” Hank Williams sang, and continues to sing, for the entire working class that dreams about big paychecks and lollygagging. The ideological categories of scarcity, discipline and delayed gratification - three essential phenomena that dominate the superego of the bourgeoisie - were totally rejected by the working class during Williams’ tenure as the king of hillbilly music, and in songs like “Settin’ the Woods on Fire,” and “Rockin’ Chair Money,” Williams proved that he embraced and helped shape the working class culture of pretension that smashed the reified – and ultimately ideological - perceptions of scarcity, discipline and delayed gratification; that was his legacy that the fifties rockers live Elvis, Carl Perkins, Johnny

Cash and Jerry Lee Lewis would come to worship in the fifties. The British invasion bands revived that legacy in the sixties.

What country singer/songwriters like Williams and Jimmy Rodgers - who himself was nicknamed the singin' brakeman because he worked on the railroad - had in common with the blues and jump blues musicians, was their working class backgrounds. As a result of their working class backgrounds, their music developed organically from their every day life experiences, as opposed to the mainstream popular music of Tin Pan Alley, which came from the top down, so to speak, from the corporate media centers like New York. The music from Tin Pan Alley, called pop "standards," was influenced by the European bourgeois traditions of separating music from every day life, a separation that turned the listening audience into passive recipients of an abstract music, and Tin Pan Alley songs described life in America as peaceful bliss. Most songs were ballads about falling in love or happy songs devoid of any references to the very real tensions and conflicts that existed between the races and classes in America. For hillbilly and rhythm and blues music, on the other hand, the musicians and the music was intimately linked to the experiences of every day life, and live performances usually included the audience in the show via call and response practices. With the exception of Hank Williams and Louis Jordan, most of the hillbilly and jump blues from the mid 1940s to the early 1950s remained isolated from the core of the music industry and from mainstream society. The music was recorded almost exclusively on independent record labels and it was largely contained socially within the working class, and geographically in the rural south and in the inner city in the North and out West. You didn't hear it on the radio very much either, which meant the only place you could hear it was on the jukebox in an out of the way working class bar. The main reason why you didn't hear it on the radio in the 1930s and 1940s is because it clashed with middle class, bourgeois values and it represented a very different version of life in America. Yet, the culture thrived, and two developments in the music industry would soon expand the boundaries of jump and blues and hillbilly. The first was the significant improvement of electronic recording technologies and the second was the invention of television, which completly restructured the format of radio in favor of previously neglected segments of the music market.

In the late 1940s, before the era of television and before the Civil Rights movement, there was no chance for a record by Wynonie Harris, Amos Milburn, T-Bone Walker and the rest of their cohort to get on the radio. Not only was radio more or less dominated by content marketed for middle class whites, but the bawdy content of rhythm and blues records, which consisted of stories about drinking and having sex was way to controversial to be considered for radio play regardless if it was sung and performed by black or white musicians. Explicitly bawdy content was strictly off limits. Rhythm and blues lived and thrived in the jukeboxes, which partly explains why rock and roll is a record culture. The improvements in recording technologies that resulted from the development of electronic recording, which replaced the older acoustic techniques of recording, combined with the discovery of magnetic tape recording technology captured by Allied forces during the war, dramatically improved the technique of recording and the quality of records, and helped to elevate the recording artist to pop icon during the 1940s. The new technologies also made record production in general more efficient, which made it possible for record companies to drop their prices on records. Even smaller independent record companies could turn a decent profit on relatively inexpensive budgets. For the major record labels sheer volume of sales created an economy of scale that allowed them to significantly drop prices. By 1946 record sales had reached more that $165 million dollars, and much of those sales were driven by the demand from jukebox operators in working class juke joints[132].

Radio had made stars out of white musicians and performers, as well as a few black musicians like Louis Armstrong, and the big bands of Duke Ellington and Count Basie, but records opened the door for working class black and white musicians who had been completely shut out of radio, since radio was controlled by taste makers who preferred middle class white norms, which meant that jump blues and hillbilly music was rarely if ever, heard on network radio in the 1930s and 1940s. But with jukeboxes, working class musicians and aficionados could have their own culture. Jump blues and hillbilly music was heard almost exclusively on records in the juke joints until the early 1950s. Still, the enormous popularity of jump blues and hillbilly music continued to drive up record sales for the music in spite of no airplay on the radio, and eventually the industry took notice. By the early 1950s record sales topped the $200 million mark[133].

Nevertheless, the United States was still a very segregated country in the late 1940s, but African Americans returning home from the war challenged segregation, and they were buoyed by working class pretensions in general to be more aggressive in their attempts to end racial discrimination and segregation. They also got a boost from rock and roll music in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In the late 1940s there were some 750,000 jukeboxes in America, and they were key in the development of rhythm and blues music that provided cultural support to the political battle for racial equality. Many black recording artists like Wynonie Harris and T-Bone Walker became big stars in spite of not being heard on the radio because of the enormous popularity of the jukebox, and because working class African Americans who visited juke joints had considerably more purchasing power after the war, they helped to drive up record sales and further bolster the new culture of pretension. These developments allowed musicians like Wynonie Harris and T-Bone Walker to make a pretty good living. More importantly, the jukebox made it possible for the working class to develop its own culture during the 1940s because a night out at the juke joint was relatively inexpensive compared to paying to see live music. Bars have always been an important social space for the American working class to develop its own, autonomous culture, and the jukebox significantly improved the atmosphere and quality of life in working class bars. With the jukebox and the relatively inexpensive "talking machine" (record player) and cheap records, the working class could have a culture to call its own. By the mid 1950s, however, all of American wanted a piece of this culture.

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[132] See Philip Kraft, *Stage to Studio*.

[133] See Russell Sanjek, *Pennies From Heaven: The American Popular Music Business in the Twentieth Century* (New York, Da Capo Press 1996) p 355.

The new recording technologies that made records more affordable and for working class kids growing up in the late 1940s were a crucial aspect to the development of rock and roll culture. Records were not only a form of inexpensive entertainment while hanging out at the bar; they were also a means for learning how to play music. Records made it possible for people of lesser means, who could not afford music lessons, to teach themselves how to play. Working class aficionados could purchase their favorite record they first heard in a jukebox, take it home, put it on the turn table pick up their guitar and learn to play. In this way too, records provided the working class with the means to develop an autonomous culture. Rock and roll gave proof to Walter Benjamin's prophetic vision outlined in his 1936 essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction[134]." Benjamin predicted that technologies that made possible the reproduction of art by mechanical means – which of course included records – would profoundly alter the social relations of production in capitalist society. Specifically, he predicted that the working class in particular stood to benefit from the transformation of art at the hands of the camera and the talking machine. While Benjamin focused mostly on the film to make his case, it is equally true with records. What Benjamin argued was that with mechanical reproduction two profound shifts in the production and consumption of art take place: first, the distinction between artist and audience becomes blurred. Second, common folk become critics and experts in the field of aesthetics. Benjamin makes his case by arguing that mechanical reproduction erodes the "aura" of a work of art by freeing it from its "parasitic" dependence on tradition and ritual, a process that gives a work of art cult value. The aura of a work of art refers to its uniqueness that stems from the particular time and place of its origin. With mechanical reproduction, not only is it meaningless to speak of an original, but also the work of art is no longer embedded in the context of its origin. It's portable. With records, you can take a performance of Beethoven, or whomever else, with you to whatever context you choose. As a result, Benjamin argues that art loses its status as a cult object, and it becomes political, since now the masses have access to it. Furthermore, mechanical reproduction means that the masses have access to the work of art, giving them the opportunity to become critics of art, a role previously enjoyed exclusively by the bourgeoisie. According to Benjamin,

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[134] Benjamin's essay is reprinted in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, edited by Hannah Arendt. (New York Schoken Books 1968).

> The technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced… The camera that presents the performance of the film actor to the public need not respect the performance as an integrated whole. Guided by the cameraman, the camera continually changes its position with respect to the performance. The sequence of positional views which the editor composes from the material supplied him constitutes the completed film… Hence, the performance of the actor is subjected to a series of optical tests… Also, the film actor lacks the opportunity of the stage actor to adjust to the audience during his performance, since he does not present his performance to the audience in person. This permits the audience to take the position of a critic, without experiencing any personal contact with the actor [emphasis mine][135].

Of course, the same is true with records, because they allow the masses the opportunity to criticize music. In addition to providing the working class with the means to become art critics, records also breakdown the distinction between performers and audience, since once again the so-called "masses" are provided with the means to learn how to play music, since records are much less expensive than private music lessons with a tutor. Benjamin makes the case with the example of print media, but again the same is the case with sound recording technologies. According to Benjamin, "with the increasing extension of the press… an increasing number of readers became writers – *at first occasional ones*. It began with the daily press opening to its readers space for 'letters to the editor.' And today there is hardly a gainfully employed European who could not, in principle, find an opportunity to publish somewhere or other comments on his work, grievances, documentary reports, or that sort of thing. *Thus, the distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character* [emphasis mine][136]." This is precisely what happened with rock and roll music: aficionados from the working class became critics of music by amassing huge record collections, and inspired workers broke down the formerly impenetrable wall between performers and listeners of music. By the early 1950s working class kids were purchasing more records, enjoying an improving lifestyle in the after hour juke joints, and becoming skilled musicians in their own right by listening to their favorite records. Most of the records they were buying were produced by independent record companies that filled the gap left by the major record labels, the big corporations and Tin Pan Alley, who taken collectively as a group, completely neglected jump blues and hillbilly music. As a result, between 1948–1954 roughly one thousand independent record companies went into business and by 1952, record sales for independent companies soared past $15 million dollars[137]. All this took place with hardly any airplay on the radio. As Benjamin perhaps would have argued, there is hardly a gainfully employed American who could not, in principle, find an opportunity to record and publish music. Then in the late 1940s there was the event that turned the whole entertainment industry upside down: television.

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[135] Ibid, p 221 and 228.

At the same time that the new technologies were improving the process of music recording, the big radio networks were developing a new medium called television. When NBC, CBS and later ABC began broadcasting on television they transferred their variety shows from radio to television. Suddenly, local affiliates were without much of their programming and many of the radio stations around the country that were part of the

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[136] Ibid, p 232.

[137] Glenn C. Altschuler, *All Shook Up: How Rock'n'Roll Changed America* (New York Oxford Press 2003) p. 15.

NBC and CBS networks struggled to find new content to fill air time. After television, music and recorded music in particular, became the dominant format for radio, and many local stations found market niches in particular kinds of music like rhythm and blues, which at last made its way onto radio in the early 1950s. As a result of the change in radio programming that followed the invention of television, a new network developed in the periphery of the music industry that connected independent record companies to local radio stations and their fan base of black and white working class people and young aspiring rock and roll musicians. The first place where all this occurred was in the South.

In the South, WHBQ in Memphis, Tennessee was one of the most popular radio stations and the most popular show was Dewey Phillips' rock and roll radio show *Red Hot'n'Blue*. Dewey Phillips is less well known today than Alan Freed, another disc jockey who was also a key figure in the development of rock and roll music, but Phillips was one of the first white disc jockeys to play black records and he was the first modern disc jockey to become a star in his own right. Phillips made himself as much a part of the show as the music, which completely changed the role of disc jockey on radio. After Phillips, radio stations that used music programming as their dominant format made the disc jockey personality a main feature of their programming content. The disc jockey was just as important a draw as the music itself. Dewey Phillips had a fiery personality with a thick southern drawl that he combined with a hip attitude that was reflected in his taste for cutting edge rhythm and blues music. He also talked over the beginning and end of songs, and would throw in all kinds of nonsense catch phrases that made his style unique. Plugging his personality into the feeling of the show helped make it successful. More importantly, Phillips served as a role model of sorts for his working class audience, proving to them that it was possible for the child of a tenant farmer to become a “hip,” “cultured” person, that working class kids could be a part of a new exciting culture, that was historically the exclusive domain of the middle class and well to do classes. The show was an overnight hit. The first night he had seven callers request records, and in less than a week he had over 100 calls a night, and his overall audience averaged over 100,000 each night. His first show in 1949 ran for just 30 minutes, but soon thereafter it ran two hours on weeknights and on Saturday from 9pm – midnight. His show made a ton of money in advertising revenues from advertisers who were targeting a new, relatively affluent black working class in Memphis, Tennessee.

Memphis, Tennessee was one of the destinations for African Americans and working class whites that left the Delta Mississippi area during the war in search of work and in desperation to escape the misery of the collapsing share cropping system of Southern agriculture. Mechanization of agriculture displaced millions from the cotton fields and it was a blessing in disguise for working class blacks and whites that labored in the fields and suffered from the backbreaking work of picking cotton. Many who left the Deep South ended up in Memphis, which had a growing economy as a result of the war, and the economy remained strong after war’s end. Chicago, New York and St. Loius where also principle destinations, but Memphis didn’t seem so far from home for many migrant workers, and like the other destinations Memphis seemed to hold out significant job prospects for workers seeking a better life. African Americans did find a better life in Memphis, and it was reflected in marketing surveys. One survey showed that blacks consumed 80 percent of the rice in Memphis, 70 percent of its canned milk and 65 percent of the all-purpose flour in that city. The same marketing study revealed that 93 percent of blacks in Memphis owned radios and in 30 percent of the households there were two radio sets[138]. Advertisers were eager to reach this new audience of consumers and with a show like *Red Hot'n'Blue* , WHBQ cashed in big time, since it was widely popular among blacks in Memphis. Dewey Phillips first broadcast his show in 1949, it was one of the first programs to air black music almost exclusively, and as a result of the demand for the music and for Dewey, it became a huge hit. Phillips was allowed to experiment with his show, since local radio stations were, in the late 1940s struggling to find their market niches after network television replaced radio as the primary medium for variety shows.

Dewey Phillips, although not related Sam Phillips, the owner *Sun* records, was a close friend of his, and the two cooperated in a novel way that became the model for how record companies and radio stations worked together. Sam would let Dewey know about which records were hot sellers in the stores and popular in the jukeboxes, and Dewey would play them on the air to attract an audience and advertising money. Soon, the arrangement starting working the other way as well, when Sam would ask Dewey to play a new record for him to boost sales. Before television, the radio and recording industries were in competition, but beginning in the late 1940s independent record companies, independent record distributors and outlets and local radio stations all worked together. The phenomenon would later become known as Payola, and it was the subject of a Congressional investigation in 1958, a topic I cover in the next chapter. It was a recipe that allowed the independent record companies to capture half of the overall market for records in the U.S. by the mid 1950s. I cover this phenomenon in more detail in the last chapter.

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[138] See Miller (1991), p 37.

As disc jockeys like Dewey Phillips as well as Zenas “Daddy” Sears on WAOK in Atlanta, “John R. Richbourg on WLAC in Nashville and Hunter Hancock on KFVD in Los Angeles soon found out, white kids were listening to their shows as well, which sparked a new interracial working class culture of music that included self educated aficionados, self-taught musicians and savvy constructors of identity. Hunter Hancock started his show “Harlematinee” in 1947, and like Dewey Phillips, Hancock’s show was a smash hit. Hancock’s show was popular with blacks, whites and Chicanos. Hancock played mostly jazz music when he first landed the job at KFVD in 1944, but in early 1947, Jack Allison from *Modern* records, a small indie label that specialized in rhythm and blues told Hancock that he was playing the wrong kind of music, and that if he wanted the radio show to succeed he should try rhythm and blues records, including some that were cut on *Modern* records. As a result of “Harlematinee” sales of rhythm and blues records skyrocketed. John Dolphin owner of *Dolphin* record shop in Hollywood that specialized in rhythm and blues records, noticed that after Hancock went on the air, his sales shot up and 40% of his buyers were white kids. Black, Chicano and white working class kids who listened to shows like *Red Hot’n’Blue* and *Harlematinee* and who as a result bought rhythm and blues and rock and roll records, as well as jazz records at the independent record stores became sophisticated aficionados of American music amassing giant record collections that reflected their knowledge of all kinds of music. They also developed a new style for themselves that was reflected in the clothes they wore and they way the talked.

Actually, it wasn’t all that “new,” because it was an appropriation of the working class culture of pretension that first emerged during the Second World War. The working class kids of the early 1950s were putting their stamp on the already existing culture, but what was new was the increasing interracial aspect of the working class culture of pretension that was emerging in the early 1950s in the South and out West. Dewey Phillips' show, as well as Hunter Hancock's, was among the first manifestations of the interracial working class culture that produced rock and roll. They broke the mold of traditional radio programming that targeted white and black audiences as separate markets of consumers, because their audiences were mixed. As blues singer/songwriter Rufus Thomas noted, "Dewey was not white. Dewey had no color[139]." Rock and roll was still primarily a working class culture, but working class kids were making it into a youth culture as well, because they were ignoring previously rigid separations between blacks and whites, not only via radio, which did nothing to alter segregation in physical spaces, but also in record stores, and especially at live performances. The increasing interracial make up of live rock and roll shows raised eyebrows in the South. White kids who loved Dewey Phillips' radio show were more frequently shopping in black record shows and peeping in the windows of black clubs on Beale street, and attending live venues where they were prone to violate the separate seating areas rules that were typical in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

One of those kids at the center of the new culture was a kid named Elvis Presley. Elvis was almost as famous for his gigantic record collection as he was for his own recordings or his gyrating pelvis. Many of Elvis' childhood friends, as well as fellow rockabilly stars like Wanda Jackson, commented on the enormity of Elvis' record collection, which contained everything: jazz, blues, jump blues, hillbilly, Western swing[140]. Elvis was just one example of how inexpensive records of relatively good quality allowed for the working class to develop its own, autonomous culture, and his background as the child of a poor working class family explains how he became part of the post World War Two generation that developed rock and roll organically as an autonomous culture of pretension. Like most of his cohort of rock and roll stars, Elvis' family members were failed sharecroppers, "victims" of the mechanization and consolidation of the cotton industry. Presley's father had moved his family from Tupelo, Mississippi to escape grinding poverty in hopes of finding better opportunities in Memphis. Once in Memphis, Elvis did what working class kids do; he hustled here and there doing odd jobs to make a few extra bucks. Elvis sold his blood, drove trucks and ushered at movie houses to help the family make ends meet, but he also made a point to keep some extra cash for himself to indulge in the new pleasures offered by their new life in Memphis. The Presley family moved into a racially mixed, working class neighborhood in Memphis, where black and white working class kids spent much of their free time listening to records together and hanging around the cornucopia of music clubs on the now famous stretch of road called Beale Street, America's capital of blues music. Poor and working class whites in the South, like Elvis Presley and his cohort of white rock and roll musicians from *Sun* records, understood and were attracted to the blues because the blues music was steeped in the African American history of work songs. In the antebellum South, African Americans sang work songs to cope with the misery of slavery, and after the dismal failure of Reconstruction, blacks sang the blues to ease the burden of sharecropping, a system of labor exploitation second only to chattel slavery for its extreme brutality. Poor whites were also exploited by the share cropping system in the post Civil War era, and they understood blues music as the organic form of music coming out of the experience of toiling the cotton fields for starvation wages. In fact, work in the cotton fields is the main point of reference for all the first generation of Southern rock and roll musicians from the early 1950s, black and white. Tina Turner worked cotton fields as a kid and she said that the experience working in the cotton fields influenced the development of her music, as well as her "career choice," in the first place. "I hated picking cotton," she said. "The sun was so hot. I dreaded it. It was those times that made me change my life. As a child, I knew I couldn't do that. It was the beginning of my…dislike and hatred for that kind of work and I decided I would not do that anymore[141]." Perhaps the most famous story about a rock and roll star escaping the prison of alienating labor is Little Richard's story of one day slamming the dishes down on the counter where he worked as a dishwasher after being slighted by his boss. Little Richard was working as a dishwasher at a bus station in Macon, Georgia at the time, and one day after his boss barked at him to work faster, he slammed the dishes down and exclaimed, "Awop bop-a lop bop-a-wop bam boom, take 'em out!!" That, according to Little Richard, was the inspiration for one of his biggest hits, "Tutti Fruiti.[142]" Little Richard's story of escape has since passed into myth, and it forms part of what is now the core of the anti-work, rock and roll narrative that younger musicians immerse themselves in while they learn the history and craft of their music. Many punk rock bands from the late 1970s constructed their identities through the anti-work narrative, and their consciousness of the common thread of resisting work that runs from the late 1940s to the present is apparent in their music, as well as their reflection on themselves as artists. Joe Strummer guitarist singer/songwriter from the 1970s British punk rock band *The Clash*, recalled, “think of Little Richard working that shitty job in Macon, Georgia, and saying to himself, ‘I’m going to get the fuck out of here. I’m going to be a rock star.’ Man that’s great, that’s fucking great[143].” Sam Phillips, the owner of *Sun* records also picked cotton as a young man, and he too fled cotton picking as if it were the plague. Although Phillips was hardly role model for the good employer or model citizen, since he had a notorious reputation for mistreating his recording artists, nevertheless, Phillips was correct in surmising that rock and roll was about escape from the drudgery of labor and that cotton picking was the supreme example of misery caused by work. Indeed all the *Sun* records artists, black and white understood that the referent that framed their music was the flight from toil, meaningless backbreaking toil. Johnny Cash, who also worked as a cotton picker, explained that was why he understood the blues. “I love and understand the blues the blues,” said Cash in an interview. “I was born and bred on them. I’m from the Delta farmland on the Mississippi[144].” Poor, working class whites in the South were attracted to the blues because African Americans have developed the most sophisticated cultural response to oppression and have provided the most effective means for aggrieved communities to resist exploitation through a variety of practices, including of course, music. Exploitation is an equal opportunity phenomenon and aggrieved communities of all racial and ethnic backgrounds appreciate the blues for that reason.

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[139] Thomas' quote is reprinted in Michael Bertrand, *Race, Rock and Elvis* (Urbana University of Illinois Press 200) p. 172.

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[140] The best biography of Elvis is Peter Guralnicks, *Last Train to Memphis: The Rise of Elvis Presley* (New York Little Brown and Company 1994).

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[141] Tina Turner's quote appears in video documentary, *The History of Rock and Roll* (Time Warner)

[142] Little Richard's story appears in Arnold Shaw's *The Rockin' 50s* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1974), 162.

Greil Marcus makes that point that the Southern rock and roll culture of the early 1950s also expressed the orgiastic side of the blues, the creation of “Dionysian revelry,” as Albert Murray claims is the main purpose of the blues. Marcus quotes from WJ Cash's book the *Mind of the South*, when he argues that the prototypical image in rock and roll music is,

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[143] *History of Rock’n’Roll.*

[144] Cash’s quote is reprinted in Bertrand (2000) p. 99.

> To go into the town on Saturday afternoon and night, to stroll with the throng, to gape a the well-dressed and the big automobiles, to bathe in the holiday cacophony… maybe have a drink, maybe to get drunk… to go swaggering into the hotels with the corridors saturated with the smell of bicloride of mercury, or the secret, steamy bawdy hosues; maybe to have a fight, maybe against the cops, maybe to end, whooping and goddaming, in the jailhouse[145].

Marcus argues that the point of rock and roll was to make Cash's description of Saturday night into the everyday, as a way of life. "Now, that Saturday night caught by Cash… would get you through a lot of weekdays…the key dividing line that made Elvis 'King of Western Bop' [more than] just another country crooner or a footnote in someone's history of the blues… [was] the idea that Saturday night could be the whole show. You had to be young and a bit insulated to pull it off, but why not? Why not trade pain and boredom for kicks and style? Why not make an escape form a way of life – the question trails off the last page of *Huckleberry Finn* – into a way of life[146]?" Marcus is exactly right. Elvis, Carl Perkins and Jerry Lee Lewis took the heartache and sadness of Hank Williams and turned it on its head. "Why not make Saturday night the whole show?" It's truly amazing to reflect on that cohort's accomplishments considering where they came from. Again, Marcus describes quite accurately the environment that Elvis and his cohort struggled against.

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[145] WJ Cash's words appear in Greil Marcus, *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock and Roll Music* (New York Plume Books 1997) p 132.

[146] Ibid p 134

> The central facts of life in Elvis' South pulled as strongly against the impulses of hedonism and romance as the facts of our own lives do against the fast pleasures of rock and roll. When the poor white was thrown back on himself, as he was in the daytime, when he worked his plot or looked for a job in the city, or at night, when he brooded and Hank Williams' whippoorwill told the truth all too plainly, those facts stood out clearly: powerlessness and vulnerability on all fronts. The humiliation of a class system that gave him his identity and then trivialized it[147]…

That Elvis and his cohort could overcome both the weight of oppression created by the Southern class system *and* the racism that over determined those class relations is one of the most interesting stories in American history.

When Elvis' cover version of "That's All Right Mama," which was first recorded by Arthur Big Boy Crudup, was first heard on WHBQ, it created a stir because after an interview that Elvis gave on the air, people were trying to find out if he was white or black. When Elvis told Dewey Phillips that he drove a delivery truck for the Crown Electric Company in Memphis, it created confusion among his listeners because many of them knew that their were just two drivers for Crown Electric, one white, and one black. Gladys Tipler, who worked for Crown Electric, said, "A lot of people were calling us up asking if he (Elvis) was white or 'colored,' because they knew our other driver was 'colored.[148]'" Even disc jockeys that regularly played Elvis' records in 1956 were unaware that he was "white." A black DJ from Clarksdale, Mississippi named Early Wright admitted he was shocked to find that Elvis was white when Elvis made an appearance on Wright's radio show. Many white disc jockeys couldn't make sense of

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[147] Ibid p 137.

[148] Ibid., p 201.

Elvis either when they first heard him, assuming he was a black musician playing in the hillbilly style. Young working class rock and roll fans embraced the confusion, because they found excitement in the new culture, whereas for older generations of conservative whites the racial confusion was a serious threat to their worldview and way of life.

In his early days before he was signed to the major record label RCA/Victor, Elvis was very popular among Southern blacks, even after everybody found out he was white. The blues singer/songwriter Rufus Thomas had a radio show on WDIA, also in Memphis, and he recalled that Elvis was well liked among his mostly African American audience, in spite of the fact that most program directors at radio stations in the South assumed that a black audience would not go for Elvis' music. According to Rufus Thomas,

> When I played his records on the air, my eyes had really been opened to his impact on people. Our station's program editor, David James, had in fact told the disc jockeys at WDIA not to play Elvis' recordings. He didn't think the station's black audience would go for a white singer. I didn't agree. I had always been able to feel music and I knew our listeners wanted songs like Elvis' songs. So I started playing them. They were electrifiying and my phone didn't stop with requests for more[149].

Of course, when it became widely know that white boys over at *Sun* records were recording their hybrid version of rhythm and blues/hillbilly music, and "acting like blacks" while playing for live audiences, racist white folks in the South attacked Elvis and his *Sun* records cohort, including Jerry Lee Lewis and Carl Perkins. For white racists, rockabilly music represented racial mixing and the potential end to Jim Crow segregation, which at that time was an extreme transgression punishable by extreme measures. In fact Carl Perkins admitted that he feared for his life when he played live shows in South during the mid 1950s. On one occasion when he was on tour with his good friend Chuck Berry, a ticket that included the Coasters, the Drifters and Little Richard, Perkins recalled that because he was the only white performer on the tour, that he could get killed for it. “They were all blacks, Perkins recalled in an interview, “and I was nervous about it, being the only white boy on the tour. I told my brother, ‘we could get killed… We’re gonna be the next Nat King Cole. Somebody’s gonna kill us[150].’” Perkins refers to the incident involving Nat King Cole and the Ku Klux Klan. In 1954 Nat King Cole as attacked during a live performance in Birmingham, Alabama by members of the Ku Klux Klan, who in public were known as the Alabama Citizen’s Council led by the notorious Asa Earl Carter, who spearheaded the racist backlash against rock and roll music in the South. Carter’s organization argued publicly that rock and roll music was a plot by the NAACP to bring the white man “down to the level of the Negro,” and in secret his group sent death threats to black and white rock and roll musicians. Perkins fears were well founded. Elvis Presley also took great risks, appearing in public at all black concerts even after he had became famous. B.B. King recalled that “for a white boy to show up at an all-black function to guts[151].”

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[149] Ibid., p. 202.

In addition to Elvis, the rock and roller who best exemplified the interracial, working class quality of early rock and roll was Chuck Berry If it took guts for Elvis to show up at an all-black function, then it took gargantuan courage for Chuck Berry to perform for all white audiences, especially in his over the top fashion that included duck walking and cocky posturing. Chuck Berry took much more risk appearing in public than Elvis did, because Berry was challenging the embedded racist institution of minstrelsy that had shaped the expectations of racist white audiences in the South. Even as late as the early 1950s, black musicians who performed for white audiences in the South were expected to conform to the "Sambo" image, of the happy, stupid, deferential black performer-servant. Chuck Berry appropriated and changed the appearance of the so-called "black body," by wresting control over the representation of blackness away from the racist white audience. He displayed himself and his music on his own terms, as if to say, emphatically, "Fuck You," to the entrenched institution of black faced minstrelsy. Chuck Berry also put his racial pride on record for white America to hear loud and clear over the radio. His hit tune "Brown Eyed Handsome Man," is a not so subtle message of black pride. Astute listeners knew the song was really about a brown *skinned* handsome man. While not as explicitly militant as James Brown's refrain, "Say It Loud, I'm black I'm Proud!," "Brown Eyed Handsome Man," was still a bit of a risk for Chuck Berry, since he had much more cross over popularity with white audiences in both country music and pop music than did Brown.

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[150] Ibid., p. 209.
[151] Ibid., p. 203.

In the early 1950s, before he became a big star, Chuck Berry, along with Little Richard, was surprised to find that some of the most energetic fans to attend his live performances in the South where white kids. In most of the live venues where rock and roll musicians performed, the audiences was assigned separate sections for blacks and whites, but there were many cases where enthusiastic white audience members, who were eager to see their favorite rock and roll star, would rush the stage, and inadvertently integrate the audience. A typical advertisement for a live rock and roll show from that era would list the names of all the bands, the time and place of course, and usually near the bottom, the add would read “gallery reserved for white spectators.” But everyone knows the gallery, which is up high, is no place for a rock and roll fan to enjoy the show. It’s much more fun to get down on the floor near the band, in the crowded area where people are dancing and getting their groove on, which is what the white kids preferred. It didn’t matter to them that they were dancing with black kids, after all it was rock and roll; the music is what mattered more than anything else. Little Richard tells stories of white kids jumping down from the balcony, which was the assigned location for white patrons, and mingling with the black kids in order to get closer to the stage. In those cases working class kids ignored the tradition of segregation, and it may have been the result of the fact that there was no color line on the radio or in the jukebox. Carl Perkins, once said, “there was no segregation on the jukebox. Kids danced to it all[152].” Chuck Berry and Elvis were key figures in the integration effect because when their records were played on the radio and the jukebox nobody could tell their racial background.

In the mid 1950s, when hillbilly and rhythm and blues were colliding in the studios of small, independent record companies like *King* records in Cincinnati, *Sun* records in Memphis, *Chess* records in Chicago, *Atlantic* records in New York, *Modern*, *Specialty* and *Aladdin* records in Los Angeles, there was confusion about how to market the music, so many singles by black artists like Chuck Berry and Sammy Lewis (Sun records) were marketed as country records and singles by white recording artists like Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis and Elvis Presley were marketed as rhythm and blues records. As a result of the marketing, when Berry’s single Maybellene went on the radio, Berry passed for white. Similarly, Presley’s single “That’s All Right Mama,” a cover version of Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup's rhythm and blues tune, he passed for black. When Chuck Berry first cut Maybellene on *Chess* records in 1955, people who heard him on the radio thought he was white because Maybellene sounded to industry insiders like a cover version of a well-known country tune. The original name for the tune was "Ida May," which was based on a popular folk song in the public domain called "Ida Red." Numerous artists, including Woody Guthrie, recorded "Ida Red". Chuck Berry's version is significantly different, but it borrowed the basic structure of Ida Red, which is why many people thought, at first, that Chuck Berry was a white recording artist. Even Carl Perkins, Chuck Berry's close friend considered Chuck Berry a country singer as much as a rhythm and blues, or rock and roll singer/songwriter. Berry could cross over genres with ease because he studied the music of Hank Williams and of course Louis Jordan, who he used as a model for his live performances. Indeed many of Berry's singles after *Maybellene* also crossed over to the country charts, and his musical repertoire didn't stop at hillbilly and rhythm and blues. On the contrary, Chuck Berry could play everything. In addition to country and rhythm and blues, Berry studied the jazz idiom as well, especially the work of jazz guitarist Charlie Christian. Chuck Berry could play everything, he was so talented, spanning and mastering the playing styles of jazz, rhythm and blues and hillbilly. He was, by far, the best rock and roll musician, singer/songwriter of the 1950s.

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[152] *History of Rock and Roll* (Time Warner)

Chuck Berry's music intentionally signified the blurring of boundaries, both sideways in terms of crossing over between rhythm and blues and country, but also vertically, by pointing at class distinction in order to blast it to smithereens. Berry had a superb sense of humor, and in the tradition of Louis Jordan, Chuck Berry used humor, irony and sarcasm to deconstruct the binary opposition between high and low culture, or "good" and "bad" music. The most famous instance is "Roll Over Beethoven", cut on *Chess* records in 1957. In addition to having a great sense of humor, Chuck Berry was cocky and confident as well he should have been, given his extraordinary talent. He knew, as did all the musicians around him that he was the best guitar player in America during the late 1950s. It made no difference what the genre was, because Chuck Berry could cut up anybody, anywhere, anytime and in any idiom. All you had to do was see him duck walk across the stage in midst of one of his amazing solos to realize Chuck Berry was maestro of maestros on the electric guitar. So, in 1956, Chuck Berry decided to announce his magnanimity to the world in *Roll Over Beethoven*. By 1956-57, the cultural backlash against rock and roll was well under way, but Chuck Berry didn't let the conservative culture police get under skin. Elitist snobs who preferred jazz and classical music joined hands with middle class moral crusaders and old-fashioned racists in a collective effort to kill rock and roll, but they couldn't stop Chuck Berry[153]. On the contrary, he turned the tables on them by writing his smash hit, *Roll Over Beethoven,* which was his way of sticking it to "the Man." Berry, as if to borrow a page out of the book of Louis Jordan, points at class difference in order to poke fun at it and deconstruct it. The song opens with what is now perhaps the most famous guitar lick in rock and roll history, and the lyrics go as follows:

> I'm gonna write a little letter,
> Gonna mail it to my local dj.
> It's a jumpin' little record
> I want my jockey to play.
> Roll over beethoven, I gotta hear it again today.

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[153] I cover the cultural backlash against rock and roll music in the next chapter.

You know, my temperature's risin'
And the jukebox blows a fuse.
My heart's beatin' rhythm
And my soul keeps on singin' the blues.
Roll over Beethoven and tell Tchaikowsky the news.
I got the rockin' pneumonia,
I need a shot of rhythm and blues.
I think I'm rollin' arthiritis
Sittin' down by the rhythm review.
Roll over Beethoven rockin' in two by two.
Well, if you feel you like it
Go get your lover, then reel and rock it.
Roll it over and move on up just
A trifle further and reel and rock it,
Roll it over,
Roll over Beethoven dig these rhythm and blues.
Well, early in the mornin' I'm a-givin' you a warnin'
Don't you step on my blue suede shoes.
Hey diddle diddle, I am playin' my fiddle,
Ain't got nothin' to lose.
Roll over Beethoven and tell Tchaikowsky the news.
You know she wiggles like a glow worm,
Dance like a spinnin' top.
She got a crazy partner,
Oughta see 'em reel and rock.
Long as she got a dime the music will never stop.
Roll over beethoven,
Roll over beethoven,
Roll over beethoven,
Roll over beethoven,
Roll over beethoven and dig these rhythm and blues[154].

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[154] "Roll Over Beethoven," from the *Chuck Berry Box Set*, (Chicago Chess Records 19)

Chuck Berry knew that he was as talented as any musician in America, and *Roll Over Beethoven* became his signature song of working class pretension. He taunts "Beethoven," which of course is the stand-in for the high culture community, by demanding that he "dig these rhythm and blues." It was as if he was saying to the bourgeois music establishment, "check me out. Have you seen anybody play guitar like this?" He was daring the conservative, high culture snobs to challenge him. For the working class rock and roll aficionados, Chuck Berry took on the entire establishment of right wing, reactionary "culture police" and kicked their butts. He was a true axe-wielding working class hero. Working class kids all over America could play that record and feel like Chuck Berry was representing their interests, like he was in their corner legitimating their culture. In this way, Chuck Berry was an organic intellectual of the working class, as articulated by Gramsci[155]. According to Gramsci, each class, in a class divided society, develops its own intellectuals to represent the interests of that class. In capitalist society, marginalized groups like workers, often replace the official representatives, or "legitimate" leaders of mainstream society, whether they are elected officials, lawyers, doctors, teachers, priests etc., with their own leaders or representatives. Organic intellectuals from the working class function as alternative mentors or leaders that serve the interests of aggrieved or marginalized groups like the working class in a capitalist society. Organic intellectuals present a perspective of the world that challenges the dominant ideology, a point of view that legitimates and reinforces the standpoint of oppressed groups against the extant ruling class. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, rock and roll stars were the organic intellectuals of the working class, articulating a point of view on society that challenged the mainstream ideology, particularly the ideology of the work ethic, meritocratic individualism and delayed gratification.

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[155] See Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York International Publishers 1971) pp. 5-23.

In addition to dismantling the bourgeois high/low cultural binary, Berry's music also continued the working class tradition of singing about the drudgery of work and the worthlessness of the Protestant work ethic. In *Too Much Monkey Business* cut on *Chess* records in 1957, Berry sings about the meaninglessness of crappy jobs, and other aspects of working class life that get in the way of the important things in life, like driving fast cars, listening to rock and roll, dressing up in the sharpest threads, romancing your lover and the pursuit of more leisure time in general. Working, paying the bills, getting drafted by the army, school and other such things, is, for most workers, a big pain in the ass, or in Berry's words, "monkey business." The first lines of "Too Much Monkey Business" proclaim:

> Runnin' to-and-fro - hard workin' at the mill.
> Never fail in the mail - yeah, come a rotten bill!
> Too much monkey business. too much monkey business.
> Too much monkey business for me to be involved in!

At the end of the song Berry sings,

> Workin' in the fillin' station - too many tasks.
> Wipe the windows - check the tires - check the oil - dollar gas!
> Too much monkey business. too much monkey business.
> Don't want your botheration, get away, leave me!
> Too much monkey business for me!![156]

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[156] "Too Much Monkey Business," from the *Chuck Berry Box Set*, (Chicago Chess Records 19)

Chuck Berry is discussed as a key figure in the history of rock and roll for many musical reasons having to do mainly with how he brought the electric guitar to the forefront of rock and roll, but also because of what the electric guitar signified when in the hands of Chuck Berry. There have been numerous "internalist" histories of rock and roll that analyze Chuck Berry's contribution to the music itself, but fewer analyses of how Chuck Berry's electric guitar signified way beyond the boundaries of the peculiar aesthetic form[157]. Berry's music had the same élan, found in the music of Wynonie Harris and Louis Jordan, but he also had the power of amplification that could more fully represent working class pretension. Whereas the honking, noisy saxophone played that role in the music of Wynonie Harris with success, the electric guitar more adequately expressed working class pretension simply because there is virtually no limit to how loud it can by played. Chuck Berry took all the energy from post war working class pretensions, plugged it into his electric car and blasted it across America, and blew up the music industry in the process, because not only did he record on, and make famous an independent record label, but because he wrote all his own material, which was a significant change in the traditional way of doing business in the core of the industry. Chuck Berry was a one-man wrecking crew[158]. In the hands of a maestro like Berry, the electric guitar was a key development in rock and roll and a crucial representation of working class pretension, because it is impossible to ignore its sound, which is often too "noisy" for those who don't have an ear for rock and roll. Indeed the electric guitar is the perfect instrument for working class pretension, primarily because it's loud, but also because it can be distorted to create a noisy sound that fits in perfectly with any worker's desire to stick it to the boss-man[159]. In short the noise produced by distorted electric guitars expresses the social dissonance of the wildcat strike and labor strife in general. Chuck Berry's legacy cannot be overstated. He was a genius on the guitar, and his brilliance with that machine revolutionized rock and roll and paved the way for the famous rock and roll guitar heroes of the 1960s, including most importantly Jimi Hendrix. His energy crossed the Atlantic ocean as well, inspiring working class kids over there too, including two bands that are not exactly inconsequential to the history of rock and roll, namely, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. Like Wynonie Harris, a generation before, Chuck Berry helped the working class deliver the news. Rock and roll was here to stay. Have you heard the news? There's good rockin' tonight. Roll over Beethoven, and tell Tchaikovsky the news.

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[157] One of the best musicological accounts of Chuck Berry is in Steve Waksman's *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience* (Cambridge, Mass. Harvard Press 1999).

[158] In the last chapter I discuss in detail how Chuck Berry was a key figure in the transformation of the labor process in the music industry.

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[159] My reading of the electric guitar is the minority position in academic circles, and it is at odds in many ways with the majority position, which is best represented by Steve Waksman's book, *Instruments of Desire*. Waksman's account has become *the* authoritative account of the role of the electric guitar in shaping musical experience in American popular culture. Waksman's superbly researched book with its commanding narrative is certainly a valuable account of the history of the impact of the electric guitar, but Waksman focuses on how the electric guitar was used to maintain inequality and reproduce exploitation in both the music industry in particular, and America popular culture in general. Waksman looks at how Les Paul's work on the development of the instrument was framed by gender difference, and it ultimately reproduced the male fantasy of domination over women in the domestic sphere. His discussion of Led Zeppelin and hard rock focuses on the ways in which rock bands like Led Zeppelin appropriated the music of non-Western culture in a colonial manner; in short white rock and roll musicians are colonialists, racists and sexists. Here, Waksman's account overlaps with many other important books that deal with the problem of misogyny and racism in rock and roll, but there is no analysis of class difference *within* white culture in rock and roll. On the contrary, "whiteness" is presented as a monolithic category. Class conflict between "whites" escapes his treatment of the electric guitar in shaping musical experience. Waksman also has an interesting chapter on Chuck Berry's use of the guitar, but at times Waksman treats Berry as a victim, downplaying his role as maverick rebel. While I agree with people like Waksman that racism and sexism were and to a large extent still are serious problems in the music industry, I take all that for granted. In other words, I'm more interested in talking about how people fight back than how they are oppressed or exploited. My interpretation begins, rather than ends, with an understanding that exploitation exists. If you're looking for exploitation, then that's what you emphasize. I find that point of view to be tedious and at times rather boring. How much more interesting it is to analyze the cases when people fight back! I prefer the point of view of critics like Ellen Willis, who while being a feminist is also able to focus on the liberating aspects of rock and roll. In other words rock and roll, like all social relations in American capitalist society, involves exploitation *and* resistance. Willis starts from exploitation, but looks for conditions of possible resistance and moments were freedom is a real possibility. I find her point of view much more interesting than Waksman's account, although *Instruments of Desire* remains a valuable addition to our understanding of rock and roll. It's just that when you read stuff like *Instruments,* you wonder about the future of cultural studies as a discipline. It seems like the dominant point of view is so pessimistic you wonder about the intentions of the authors. Do they themselves desire freedom? I've found a puritanical suspicion in many "cultural studies" accounts of rock and roll, like Waksman's. Whenever these critics discuss desire or pleasure, it is always already framed as domination. White desire is always already colonial desire, desire to appropriate, consume and dominate the non-white Other. Similarly, these critics understand male desire as always already misogynistic desire. The reductionism is tedious and it seems that these critics desire asceticism as a value in itself, since there is no reflection on their own puritanicalism. The focus on desire as always already desire to dominate is extremely simplistic and it betrays an unconscious asceticism that views pleasure as sinful, no matter how secularized the analysis may or may not be. To reduce desire to a will to dominate is a disingenuous strategy to get rid of pleasure altogether.

In addition to carrying on the anti-work theme of 1940s rock and roll, Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley and their generation also emphasized the reality of, and desire for an improving lifestyle that accompanies greater access to material goods in an expanding economy. Just as workers demanded a bigger piece of the pie during and after World War 2, working class rock and roll musicians and their fans in the 1950s insisted on getting their share of the good life, which included not only donning yourself in the finest threads possible, but driving a fast car, and having plenty of cash in your pocket for Friday and Saturday night. The theme of fast cars is a main feature of Chuck Berry's repertoire, starting with his first hit "Maybellene," which is about a car race between a Ford and a Cadillac, and the best way to express fast cars in music is with an electric guitar, of course. Many of Berry's songs are also about upward mobility that was made possible by an insurgent labor movement. His songs reflect the climate of the rising standard of living among workers during the 1950s, as well as the emergence of a new class of working class teenage consumers. Rising incomes for workers during the 1950s meant that their kids had more money to spend on the jukebox and their gas tanks. Chuck Berry's songs are also about rock and roll music as a vehicle to escape poverty. "Johnny B. Goode," Berry's anthem for every young, working class, aspiring rock and roll guitar player, is about a talented working class kid beating the odds and becoming a famous rock star. The song is about him of course, but millions of working class kids found inspiration in Berry's story of becoming a wealthy, famous, glamorous rock star. In short, unlike alienated subcultures from the middle class like the beatniks of the 1950s and the college kids of the sixties counter-culture that rejected "materialism," working class rock and roll musicians and aficionados embraced materialism and the good life. Indeed, they *demanded* it. "My father saw we never went hungry, but well, you know I never had a lot," Elvis once said. "When I first began to get some money, I bought a lot of things I had always wanted, like cars. I did some things I never could do before – and believe me, it was fun[160]." The same can be said about Elvis' entire cohort of rock and roll stars as well as the generations that came before, like Howlin' Wolf's generation of electric bluesmen. Materialism was not viewed as a problem, because as Wolf says, when you don't have anything you have the blues, you think you're a nobody. On another occasion, Presley spoke for all workers who appeal to music both as an escape from work and as a means to make some money when he said, "I wanted to be a singer because I didn't want to sweat. Had a job drivin' a truck when I got out of high school. After that I got a job at a dollar an hour in a defense plant. About a year and a half ago when I first started singing I figured it'd be easy… I like making lots of money[161]." Elvis, like Howlin' Wolf, made it to that place where "when you have this and you have that then you ain't got no right to be worried about nothing."

The other key figure in the mid 1950s generation of rock and roll recording artists is the incomparable Wanda Jackson. Jackson's body of work is perhaps the most significant of her era, because her work challenges the dominant view that rock and roll is exclusively male oriented, or the view that the guitar is simply an extension of the penis/phallus, or that rock and roll is inherently misogynistic or whatever other argument you like about how women were completely shut out of rock and roll because of sexism. Of course sexism was, and is a major problem in American society, but Wanda Jackson did the rockabilly thing as good as any of the boys if not better, proving that the desire for pleasure expressed by rock and roll is not always already misogynist desire. On the contrary, Wanda Jackson legitimated the quest for pleasure in rock and roll by carving out a space for women on equal terms with men. Like her cohort, Jackson came from a working class background. She was born in 1937, in Maud, Oklahoma in the midst of the Depression/Dust Bowl era. Times were tough for here family when she was growing up. Her father scratched together a living working at odd jobs, including pumping gas, working in a bakery and playing guitar in the local bars. In 1942 he moved the family to Los Angeles when he landed a job in a munitions factory, like thousands of other Oklahomans looking to escape the Dust Bowl tragedy. After the war the Jackson family moved back to Oklahoma City when Wanda's dad got a job driving a taxi cab and another one selling cars.

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[160] Bertrand, (2000) p 119.
[161] Ibid, p 121.

Wanda made her first inroads into the music industry when she won an amateur singing contest that was broadcast over the radio. Hank Thompson, a country music star from Oklahoma City heard her and helped get her signed to a record deal on Decca to cut mainstream country songs. Jackson started her career as a country singer, but when she performed at a show that featured both country and rockabilly bands, she met a young Elvis Presley, before he was a successful recording artist. The two met in 1955 on tour in the South. Elvis convinced her to give rockabilly a try. He recognized her awesome talent instantly, and encouraged her to pursue a recording career in rockabilly instead of country, since he believed that the future of music was in rock and roll. "He [Elvis] kept saying, 'you can do this, I can tell. You've got the kind of voice for it, and you've got the feel,'" said Jackson in an interview. "He took me to his home in Memphis and we went through his record collection of black blues[162]." She and Elvis dated for some time, but Jackson ended up signing with Capitol records, and Elvis went to RCA/Victor and they parted ways. Wanda Jackson went on to become one of the biggest rockabilly stars in the mid 1950s and she regularly toured with Carl Perkins and Elvis Presley and her act always got equal billing. "I was really a maverick," she said. "I was trying to put some glamour and sex appeal into country music when it wasn't the done thing." Eventually Wanda gave up country music, in part because of the repressive culture. Jackson recalls an episode in 1955 where she was not allowed to wear a spaghetti strap dress on stage at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville. "I had a brand new dress, and was about to go on stage," recalled Jackson, "when Ernest Tubb said 'you're not wearing that dress on stage are you?' I said, 'yes sir.' He said, 'you can't show your shoulders.' I said, 'what do you mean?' He insisted so I had to get an old fringed jacket…and cover my dress. I was so mad I could hardly sing. That's the only time I did the Opry. I said, 'never again[163].'" Wanda's decision to leave mainstream country music for rockabilly paid off well. She had a string of hits including, "Fujiyama Mama," "Hot Dog That Made Him Mad," "Mean, Mean Man," and "Rock Your Baby." Jackson wrote about half of all the music she recorded, which was more control than even Elvis had over his own work. More importantly, Jackson sang about things that were unheard of for women of her day.

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[162] Jackson's account comes from the liner notes on her album, *Wanda Jackson: Queen of Rockabilly*, (London Ace records 2000).

[163] Ibid

While Patti Page was singing about innocuous topics like cute little doggies, Jackson was singing about dating her boyfriend's best friend in order to take control over her relationship and get her man to behave. The lyrics for "Hot Dog That Made Him Mad," go as follows:

> I've got a guy; I like him fine,
> But he takes me for granted all the time,
> To teach him a lesson and make him mad,
> I went on a date with the best friend he had
> Hot Dog that made him mad,
> And he hugged me and kissed me and asked me not to do it again
> Late last night when I came in, he demanded to know just where I'd been
> But I put him in his place by laughing in his face,
> Hot Dog that made him mad
> And he hugged and kissed me and asked me not to do it again[164]!

In addition to singing about the virtues of standing up to men and seizing command over domestic relationships, Jackson also sang about the need for women to demand their rights to pleasure including sexual pleasure. A decade before feminism articulated a position on a woman's right to control her body and her sexuality, Wanda Jackson was putting those demands on records, on *hit* records no less! In "Rock Your Baby," Jackson sings about a woman demanding that her man learn how to please her, and please her well. More incredible is Jackon's signature tune "Fujiyama Mama," a tune about Wanda enjoying the ecstasy of an orgasm, which was actually more popular in Japan than the U.S. perhaps because of references to Nagasaki or perhaps for its outrageous sexual content. "I'm a 'Fujiyama Mama' and I'm just about to blow my top," sings Jackson.

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[164] The lyrics to "Hot Dog," appear on *Wanda Jackson: Queen of Rockabilly*, (London Ace records 2000).

"And when I start erupting, there ain't nobody that can make me stop." "Blowing one's top," was a metaphor for having an orgasm, an expression that goes back to urban slang from the 1940s. The expression was very popular in jump blues records from the late 1940s. In "Fujiyama Mama," Jackson also brags that she can "drink a quart of sake… smoke a giant pipe… and blew your head off with nitroglycerine… and cause destruction like an atom bomb!" Nitroglycerine is the perfect metaphor for Jackson's music, which taken as a whole makes her peers like Jerry Lee Lewis seem rather tame in comparison. Sure, Jerry Lee had "balls of fire," but Wanda Jackson could drop an atom bomb on your ass. Wanda also cut a superb cover version of Jerry Lee's "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On," to prove that she wasn't afraid to go toe to toe with the boys. Her version of "Let's Have a Party," from 1958 is far better than Elvis' version from a year earlier, and she also cut an excellent cover of Little Richard's "Long Tall Sally." The fact that she rock as hard or better than the boys earned her the nickname "Queen of rockabilly." The fact that in 1957 a "pretty" white woman was singing about killing people who dared to get in the way of her having an orgasm speaks volumes about how important Wanda Jackson is to both feminism and rock and roll. Nobody did rockabilly better than her and nobody before or since has expressed the élan of rock and roll better than Wanda Jackson. It was not just the content of her lyrics that made Wanda Jackson a bad ass to reckon with; it was the *way* she sang and the energy that explodes out of her records. She had a very aggressive singing style that used a slight growl to distort her voice, and she combined the growl with suddenly pitch changes up and down that produced a feeling that was both tough and sexy. Another interesting tidbit about Jackson's career is that she recorded and performed with a mixed race rock and roll band called Bobby Poe and the Kats from

Arkansas. The pianist and lead singer, Big Al Downing was black. The guitarists, Bobby Poe and Vern Saundasky, as well as the drummer Joe Brawley were white. Jackson cut some of her best records with Poe's band including "Rock Your Baby," and "Let's Have a Party," which reached number 38 on Billboard's hot 100 in late 1959. More importantly, they went on tour with Wanda in 1958 under the pseudonym "Party Timers." It wasn't enough for Wanda Jackson to be in your face with her unapologetic, aggressive feminism in the midst of the conservative 1950s. No, she figured she'd *also* perform in public with an interracial band while she sang about her erupting orgasms. Wanda Jackson was light years ahead of her time.

Unfortunately for her fans and for rock and roll culture in general Wanda Jackson gave up rockabilly in the early 1960s for country music on the advice of the management at her record label. Perhaps a white woman who sang like she was possessed by a sex-crazed demon was just too much for the industry to take. She also got married in 1962 and had two children, which slowed her down. What a shame.

While one should be careful not to give rock and roll music too much credit for either ending Jim Crow in the South, or for furthering the cause of equal rights for women, it nonetheless did have a serious impact on race and gender relations. While it's true that most rock and roll musicians at the time were men, and a majority of the tunes about sexuality were from a man's point of view, Wanda Jackson was able to challenge gender norms and sexism in profound ways. In terms of race, rock and roll musicians themselves believed they were contributing to the effort of ending Jim Crow. Carl Perkins, for instance recalled a conversation with Chuck Berry, where the two agreed that, "we [he and Berry] might be doing as much with our music as our leaders are in

Washington to break down barriers [segregation.][165]" What allowed rock and roll musicians to break down the barriers of racial segregation was a shared class position in the Southern working class; their common experiences as workers provided a bridge between black and white cultures. Working class whites, especially in the South, have a long tradition of developing subcultures to deal with exploitation and oppression that goes back to the days of indentured servitude and the back breaking work in the 19th century coal mines that were filled almost exclusively with Scotch-Irish people of the Appalachia, the so-called hillbilly "white trash." Of course, those experiences do not compare with the nightmare of slavery, but one reason why the Celtic folk music of the Appalachian region began to cross over with the blues as early as the mid 19th century, was the shared experience in the social relations of production in the rural South. But class position is not something automatic. That's not "how class works[166]." On the contrary, class is, to borrow a phrase from E.P. Thompson, something that has to be made. To say class is not simply a subject position in a socio-economic formation is to say that the cultural dimension matters as much as the structural dimension, because there is no class without an awareness or consciousness of class. Culture matters, because it has material effects in the world, and in America, rock and roll music played a key role in the formation of the working class in from the 1940s to the 1950s. Working class whites from the South were able to identify with the content of blues music, which developed organically out of the experiences of laboring in the cotton fields, because poor whites themselves were no strangers to back breaking, meaningless work. That identification, which was also based on the failure of the sharecropping system in the 1930s, allowed working class whites and blacks to create a common culture of rock and roll. Of course racism continued to poison the South well into the rock and roll years of the 1950s, but that just emphasizes how remarkable it was the rock and roll emerged from the South, rather than supposedly more tolerant areas of the country.

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[165] *History of Rock and Roll* Video documentary.
[166] See Aronowitz, *How Class Works: Power and Social Movement* (New Haven Yale Press 2003)

Louis Jordan, Wynonie Harris, Big Joe Turner, T-Bone Walker, Hank Williams, Bob Wills, and Amos Milburn cut the mold for 1950s rock and roll, and their music emerged organically from the pretensions of working class culture in the 1940s. While most historians of rock and roll peg the youth culture of the 1950s as the origin of rock and roll, it is my contention that the substance of rock and roll in the 1950s, the bravado of the performers, the rough and tumble content and form of the music and the spirit of pleasure and the rejection of delayed gratification all came from the working class culture that prevailed a decade earlier. In short, when rock and roll went mainstream at the end of the 1950s, it seemed like a creation of the middle class youth culture, but really it was an extension of 1940s working class pretensions. The fifties rock and rollers themselves were well aware that they were continuing the tradition of working class pretensions from the forties. One Elvis' first big hits, was a cover version of "Good Rockin' Tonight," and Chuck Berry himself draws a direct line from his music back to Louis Jordan. Even as late as the counter-culture, which was intimately linked to rock music, you can still find working class pretensions in the music and culture. While it's true that the counter-culture was largely a middle class phenomenon, the result of dissident college students, the emphasis on pleasure and the rejection of delayed gratification that was at the core of the sixties counter-culture and rock music has roots in the working class culture of pretension of the forties.

While pretensions were high among the rock and roll musicians of the early and mid 1950s, the promoters working at the independent labels were more cautious, because they foresaw the conservative backlash against rock and roll that was just around the corner. As early as 1951 when Wynonie Harris cut several hits for King records, the label's A&R man, Henry Glover was worried about marketing rock and roll music, because the middle class audience considered rock and roll music "filthy," particularly the term "rock," and other double entendres that signified sexual activity. According to Henry, "we were restricted with our possibilities of promoting [Wynonie's music] because it was considered filth[167]." The impending cultural backlash against rock and roll included, ironically the musicians' union. The same working class pretensions of the 1940s that made their way into rock and roll music were partly created by the musicians' union, especially their great victory over the recording industry in 1943, but somehow they turned against those very pretensions when they attacked rock and roll. The working class content of rock and roll was completely lost on the musicians' union, and the leadership of the AFM, as well as famous members of the rank and file who joined the chorus of outcries against the moral depravity of rock and roll. It is to that issue, that we now turn.

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[167] Miller (1999), p. 31.

CHAPTER FOUR:

IF I HAD A HAMMER: UNION MUSICIANS "BOP" RHYTHM AND BLUES AND ROCK AND ROLL

"If it sounds good, and it feels good, then it is good."

-- Duke Ellington

"I don't know a thing about music. In my line you don't have to."

-- Elvis Presley

In an interview from 1982, Claude Trenier, one time lead vocalist for the rhythm and blues group the Trenier Twins, recalled that

> When we used to jam at Billy Berg's club in Hollywood, all those bebop musicians would shy away from us. They thought we weren't cool because we jumped around and shouted and all that.[168]

Trenier, a former vocalist for the Charles Mingus Orchestra, formed a jump blues group with his brother Cliff, Don Hill and the Gene Gilbeaux Quartet in 1947. They billed themselves as the Trenier Twins and the Gene Gilbeaux Quartet, and then after a string of successful gigs on the West Coast later that year, as simply the Trenier Twins. Their band was similar in many ways to Louis Jordan's band. They played mostly jump blues music, and together with Louis Jordan and the blues shouters like Wynonnie Harris and Big Joe Turner, they were influential in the development of rock and roll in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In fact, in 1949 a Chicago Jazz club called the Blue Note (the other blue note) billed the Trenier twins as the "the Rockin' Rollin' Trenier Twins." On of their biggest hits was "Rockin' is Our Business." The Trenier Twins had a background in jazz music, and like Louis Jordan, they left the jazz scene in the mid to late 1940s to focus exclusively on performing and recording rhythm and blues music. The Trenier Twins, Louis Jordan and groups like them thought they were doing something new and hip with rhythm and blues. They referred to their music as jump blues, because they kept the chord structure of the blues, and the AAB line or measures, but they sped up the rhythms and added more complicated harmonic and instrumental arrangements. The music industry, however, paid no attention to these changes, and continued to market their music as "race" music until 1949 when *Billboard* magazine finally changed the name of the category to rhythm and blues. Jump blues or rhythm and blues had the melodic structure of traditional blues music, but the musicians played it on top of a driving rhythm that came from swing jazz. A typical jump blues band had about 6 or 7 members: a drummer, a bassist, a pianist, a guitarist (electric), one or two saxophonists, one or two musicians on trumpet, and finally, a vocalist, usually a blues shouter. This kind of band eventually became the template for rock and roll bands in the 1950s, except that the electric guitar eventually displaced the saxophone as the lead instrument.

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[168] Trenier's account is told by Nick Tosches in Unsung *Heroes of Rock and Roll: The Birth of Rock in the Wild Years before Elvis* (Da Capo Press New York) 1999.

The mid 1940s was a period when big band swing music was in decline and jazz musicians broke off in two competing directions: one toward rhythm and blues and the other toward bebop. The only thing in common between jump blues groups and bebop groups was their size. Both bebop musicians and jump blues musicians preferred a small combo of no more than 6 musicians, rather than the big band ensembles from the thirties that could have more than 20 musicians. Bebop musicians preferred to create complex melodies and harmonic structures that led to surprising twists and turns in their performances rather than orient the music around the driving rhythms and heavy back beats that characterized jump blues. The cultural divergence in musical styles was also a political divergence between the world-views of rhythm and blues musicians and bebop musicians. Jump blues/R&B groups were interested in "playing music for the working man," as Louis Jordan was found of saying. Jump blues was rowdy music with "honking" saxophones that squawked loudly with distortion when blown really hard. Jump blues was fun and easy to dance to, unlike Bebop. The substance of the early rhythm and blues music scene placed an emphasis on pleasure, particularly the sexual kind, as well as on an escape from the alienating experience of factory work and the quotidian. For beboppers on the other hand, the musical emphasis was on educating the masses, "advancing" music, and fighting racism in the music industry. Beboppers considered themselves "serious" musicians, and they looked down on jump blues musicians like the Treneirs as clowns or worse, as "Uncle Toms." One of the most notorious songs written and performed by the Trenier Twins, and despised by beboppers was "Poontang." Many radio stations banned it, but it was a huge hit in working class jukebox joints. Beboppers, however, found the song offensive and lowbrow.

In the late 1940s, it was not uncommon for rhythm and blues groups to perform at the same venues where bebop musicians played, but as Trenier himself describes in the passage above, there wasn't any camaraderie or love lost between the two kinds of musicians. Bebop musicians and the older generation of swing jazz musicians considered rhythm and blues to be inferior to jazz, especially bebop. Beboppers criticized the structure of jump blues songs for being simple and stupid, and they referred jump blues musicians as "entertainers" *not* musicians. The "entertaining" aspect of jump blues was thought by the beboppers to be particularly degrading for black Americans, since it signified Southern traditions borrowed from minstrel shows. Consequently, the Trenier Twins and Louis Jordan frequently experienced the cold shoulder from bebop musicians who shared their venues in the 1940s. The cold shoulder eventually became an outright attack, as bebop and swing jazz musicians ramped up their hostility toward rhythm and blues in the 1950s. As rhythm and blues continued to grow in popularity and as R&B musicians continued to separate themselves from the culture of jazz music and bebop in particular, jazz musicians began to publicly criticize rhythm and blues in the trade magazines. The criticisms intensified with rock and roll music in the mid 1950s, when rock and roll dominated the music charts.

Jazz was widely respected and performed by the members of the musicians' union at the time when rock and roll was posed as a problem, because in part, it had been fundamentally altered and made more acceptable to white society by the "symphonic" techniques of Paul Whiteman and by the popularity of songs written by Irving Berlin, who had appropriated the term "ragtime," in his hit tune "Alexander's Ragtime Band" as I discussed in the first chapter. Jazz was for the most part no longer controversial in the late 1940s. The important exception, of course, was bebop, and what made bebop "controversial" in the eyes of some was the fact that very few white jazz musicians were playing bebop, and that bebop possessed, supposedly, a "black nationalist" perspective on music and society. Although Dizzy Gillespie once said, "We didn't go out and make speeches or say, 'Let's play eight bars of protest[169],'" nevertheless, the creators of bebop, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonius Monk, Charlie Parker, Charles Mingus and others intentionally developed a very complicated jazz music so white musicians would not be able to play it, or rather, *steal* it. Monk was reported to have said, "We're going to create something they [the white power structure in the music industry] can't steal because they [white musicians] can't play it[170]." Bebop originated in New York City, at Minton's Playhouse located uptown on 118th street in Harlem. Minton's place became famous as a spot where jazz musicians gathered for impromptu jam sessions. These typically consisted of small combos of musicians, as the big band era was in decline by the early 1940s, and out of these spontaneous jam sessions emerged bebop. Henry Minton, who was a delegate from Local 802 of the American Federation of Musicians in New York City, owned Minton's Playhouse, and although all the famous bebop musicians were members of the AFM, their music was not widely understood by their white rank and file colleagues[171]. Nonetheless, all the rank and file members of the musicians' union respected bebop, and while Bebop musicians maintained a critical stance toward a music industry that they considered to be racist, their white colleagues in the union supported their musical movement, especially the white members in the AFM locals in New York and Chicago. The highbrow sensibilities of the bebop musicians ensured that they would have a friendly home inside the musicians' union. In places like New York, white and black jazz musicians were united by aesthetic elitism, and their shared ideology was encouraged by and promoted within the AFM. Eventually, many white musicians did begin playing bebop. The first white jazz musician to embrace bebop was Woody Herman, who learned how to play the new style from Dizzy, and Herman's work opened the doors for more white musicians to play bebop in the early fifties. The vigorous adherence to highbrow aesthetic ideals was a means of creating interracial solidarity among union musicians during the era of bebop, a solidarity that would eventually result in the integration of all the AFM locals by the mid 1960s.

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[169] Dizzy's comment is taken from Eric Porter's book, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz*, (University of California Press, Berkeley) 2002. p58.

[170] The account of Monk's statement can be found in Scott DeVeaux's *The Birth of Bebop: a Social and Musical History*, (UC Press, Berkeley) 1997. p 351.

[171] On the topic of black nationalism and bebop see Leroi Jones, *Blues People*, and Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bop*.

Bebop developed in the social context of changing expectations in the African American community after World War II. Many blacks had migrated to the North and West during the war to take advantage of the increased demand for labor during the war, as well as to escape the entrenched racism of the South. In the booming manufacturing areas in the North, and in the newly created defense industries in the West, African Americans enjoyed a rising standard of living and their influence as consumers gave them new power in the American economy. Blacks had also successfully fought their way through the racial discrimination in some of the major labor unions in America, becoming activists in several industrial unions. When African American soldiers returned from the war, which was fought in part as an ideological war against the dogma and propaganda of racial superiority, they were unwilling to tolerate discrimination at home. Fighting against the Nazi doctrine of white supremacy abroad made it particular unbearable for blacks to face the same doctrine at home. As a result, a renewed culture of resistance to racism and discrimination took hold in black communities after the war. By the end of the war, African Americans had accumulated significant amounts of economic and cultural capital, and these new sources of capital created the conditions for a growing black militancy.

Bebop musicians, for their part, challenged the entrenched racism of the music industry. Dizzy said about the bebop musicians that they "refused to accept racism, poverty, or economic exploitation, nor would [they] live out uncreative humdrum lives merely for the sake of survival[172]." According to Gillespie, the issue for bebop musicians was how to (a) advance their music beyond the "humdrum" boredom of pop music, (b) challenge racism in the music industry and (c) lift up and educate the audience, in particular the rural black audience. Bebop musicians were frustrated with what they thought was the simple and crude music of the Southern black community. On the other hand, beboppers were also frustrated by racism in the music industry, the business of music that forced them to play in a particular style that perpetuated racist stereotypes of the "primitive" black entertainer, images that the racist white audience in the South came to expect from black musicians. Musicians like Gillespie, Charlie Parker and Monk fought against the stereotypes of black music that was promoted by a culture industry controlled by whites, and they developed bebop as a means to break out of the race market created by the music industry. Up until 1949 *all* of black music, including jazz, blues and gospel was tagged by the industry as "race" music, and it was these restrictive and discriminatory practices that bebop musicians refused to accept. In addition to challenging racist stereotypes, bebop musicians struggled against the two tiered wage scale that paid black musicians less than white musicians for the same work in both recording studios and live performances. Perhaps the worst injustice that plagued black musicians was the widespread thievery of unscrupulous record label owners who refused to pay mechanical royalties to their black recording artists[173]. Racist white record label owners were also known to take the credit as authors of songs that were written by their black recording artists, thereby stealing their recording artists' royalty rights as composers[174]. Another main issue for the bebop musicians was the problematic practice of "covering" music - covering is the process where one group of musicians performs or records music written by a different group of musicians. In the music industry, there is a long history of white musicians covering black music and making a lot of money in the process, while many black musicians were systematically cheated out of mechanical royalties and song writing credit. The practice was widespread in the 1950s with rock and roll as well, but rock and roll was never on the radar screen of bebop musicians.

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[172] Dizzy Gillespie, *To Be or Not to Bop*, (Da Capo New York) 1985. page 287.

Bebop musicians figured if they could develop a music that white owned and controlled record labels would not be able to understand let alone record, then they could protect their music and their culture from thieving white musicians and racist record companies. What made bebop unique was the fast tempo, complex harmonies, extraordinarily intricate melodies and the way in which the drums laid down the steady beat almost exclusively on the ride cymbal. These characteristics made bebop difficult to perform for musicians accustomed to the older swing jazz.

Ironically, however, is that while the bebop musicians were carving out an oppositional culture of their own against the racist establishment that controlled the music industry, they still found time to join in with white jazz musicians in the bashing of rhythm and blues and rock and roll music. Famous jazz musicians from each of the sub-genres, all of whom were members of the musicians' union, were united against rock and roll, especially the influence of blues music on rock and roll. Rock and roll's roots in the working class culture of resistance was not understood by bebop musicians. Bebop musicians never seriously considered the social content of rhythm and blues music, which is the escape from alienating work, and the affirmation of leisure, because beboppers considered representations of working class leisure activities to be degrading to black people. Bebop musicians misinterpreted legitimate working class resistance to the monotony of work in modern America through pursuit of leisure practices as "clowning" behavior that signified Uncle Tom foolery. The misinterpretation of rhythm and blues by the beboppers followed from the discourse of modernism that surrounded and shaped bebop culture. The opposing discursive fields between bebop, and rhythm and blues explain the beboppers disgust with the jump blues movement.

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[173] There are numerous accounts of the history of racism in the music industry. For the best narratives, see Chapple and Garofalo "Black Roots, White Fruits: Racism in the Music Industry," in their book *Rock'n'Roll is Here to Pay: The History and Politics of the Music Industry* (Nelson-Hall, Chicago) 1977. See also *Black Music, White Business: Illuminating the History and Political Economy of Jazz,* by Frank Kofsky (Pathfinder, New York) 1998.

[174] For a detailed analysis of the structure of stealing in the music industry that exploited black musicians see Norman Kelley editor, *Rhythm and Business: The Political Economy of Black Music*. (Akashic, New York 2002).

The challenge for the beboppers was how to get southern blacks, an audience that was used to the blues, to develop a taste for the more modern, "sophisticated" bebop music. Bebop musicians who worked in traveling jazz orchestra's like the Cab Calloway Orchestra and the Billy Eckstine band resented touring in the South because they were forced to play "down" to a rural black audience that expected to hear the blues. Charlie Parker disparagingly referred to the blues as "rice and beans" music. As part of a strategy to "educate" the black masses, the bebop musicians would make changes to blues and jazz songs in a gradual way to influence the taste of southern black audiences. When they were on tour playing in one of the big bands, Gillespie and Parker would make changes to standard arrangements of popular tunes during live performances to make the music more "sophisticated," but they were careful not to change things too much because they had to keep it "simple" enough for audiences to be able to dance to it. Dizzy claimed that, "They're [the audience] not particular about whether you're playing a flatted fifth, or a ruptured 129th as long as they can dance[175]."

Bebop musicians signified their upward mobility and sophistication in part by using the abstract language of music theory, which was the core of their modernist discursive field. Talk of smuggling "flatted fifths" and "ruptured 129ths" past an unsuspecting audience was a way to demonstrate their highbrow sensibilities and signify their social *distance* from the working class. Elsewhere, Gillespie admitted that, "the bebop musicians didn't like to play the blues. They were ashamed. The media had made it shameful[176]." In another discussion about bebop musicians begrudgingly performing rhythm and blues music in public in order to fulfill contract obligations to club owners, Dizzy Gillespie argued:

> Bebop is a highly sophisticated form of music; the blues is very simple in form. The bebop musicians wanted to show their virtuosity. They'd play the twelve bar outline of the blues, but they wouldn't blues it up like the older guys *they considered unsophisticated*. They busied themselves making changes, a thousand changes in one bar[177]. (Emphasis is mine).

Ironically, while the beboppers were doing their best to distance themselves from the blues by appropriating a bourgeois aesthetic, white working class kids growing up in the U.S. and U.K. were getting turned on to the blues. The ironic part is that for working class white kids, blues music as an avenue for *upward* mobility. The "older guys," that Dizzy refers to, including blues musicians like Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Ledbelly and the rhythm and blues shouters like Wynonie Harris and Big Joe Turner may have been dismissed by the jazz musicians in the union, but they were icons for young rock and roll musicians in the late '50's and early '60's. The Rolling Stones, for example, took their name from a Muddy Waters tune, and Keith Richards, the rhythm guitarist from the Rolling Stones, was a huge fan and self-studied pupil of Robert Johnson, the guitar virtuoso known as the "king of the Delta blues." Rock and roll musicians worshipped Robert Johnson as a master of guitar, and his techniques were carefully studied. Richards said of Johnson,

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[175] DeVeaux, p 347.

[176] Ibid., p 343.

[177] Gillespie is quoted in DeVeux, in *Birth of Bebop*, page 340.

> When you listen to him…the cat's got Bach going down low and Mozart going up high. He was counter-pointing and using incredible stuff[178].

Many rock musicians from the British Invasion era, including the Rolling Stones, the Beatles and Eric Clapton used the "highbrow" language of music theory (like Richards' does in the quote above) whenever they described the musicians that they found most influential to the development of their own style. Ironically, it's the same vocabulary, more or less, that jazz musicians used to *dismiss* the blues and rock and roll. Richards' himself was academically trained in music, having attended Sidcup art school in England, and he was well versed in the language of music theory. Richards' points out above that Robert Johnson was a master of counterpoint techniques in his music and he compares Jordan's accomplishments to those of a Bach or a Mozart, two central figures in the canon of highbrow European music. How ironic that the same language that was supposed to insulate jazz and classical musicians from the "stupid heathens" of rock and roll was well understood and appropriated by those very heathens. The "lowly" R&B and rock and roll musicians, however, never desired to gain social distance from the working class, because they embraced the working class leisure activities and the spirit of resisting work that is the core of working class culture, including rock and roll music.

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[178] Richards' remarks appear in the liner notes to Robert Johnson's album *Robert Johnson: King of the Delta Blues* (Columbia Records, 1997).

The emerging modernist, bourgeois discourse in bebop involved moving jazz music in the direction of classical music, and many, like Miles Davis, were trained in the classical idiom by the academy. Other bebop jazz musicians like Charles Mingus composed musical numbers that combined jazz and classical music, and to be successful in that endeavor, Mingus believed that he had to breakdown racial barriers between the two genres, in particular racial discrimination that prevented black musicians from working in the classical areas. Racial inequality and discrimination were being challenged by beboppers, but *class* separation and discrimination was actively embraced with the attempt to merge jazz with classical music. Bebop musicians were breaking down racial barriers in the industry and in the union, while also creating *more distance* between themselves and working class culture. Mingus, for example, was an activist in the effort to desegregate the musicians' union at the time he was experimenting with compositions that combined elements of classical and jazz music. As an influential member in the black local in Los Angeles, Local 767, Mingus helped create the successful movement to merge 767 with the white local, Local 47 in 1952. Mingus' and the other black musicians' success in the integration drive was due in part to the elitist aesthetic imaginary that united white and black musicians in the union. Interracial solidarity among union musicians was achieved by way of a shared modernist, bourgeois aesthetic.

At the same time Mingus was also active in breaking down racial barriers in musical education. Mingus argued that although black musicians could receive extensive training in the African American musical community, there remained serious "short comings" in the development of musical training for black musicians because of institutionalized racial discrimination in academia. One area in particular that demonstrated the continued problem of discrimination in music academies in the 1950s was the lack of African American musicians working in America's symphonies. Mingus argued that too much potential talent was going to waste in the African American musical community, and he situated the issue in the language or context of classical music. Mingus asked,

> Can we send a potential Ravel, Debussy or Stravinsky to his grave without affording him the chance to prove that music has advanced many steps and that many composers as great as any of the old are being forced to write background music for the *slipping off Mabel's girdle*, rather than the *true* emotions of the inner self [my emphasis][179]?

It is interesting that Mingus coded "talented" black musicians as "Ravel's," or "Stravinky's," on the one hand, while he used "girdle" to signify "low" music on the other hand. Mingus' example shows that the appropriation of highbrow bourgeois values by jazz musicians was a means to dismiss rhythm and blues on *moral* grounds, a morality that was coded in the language of music theory. Rhythm and blues and rock and roll is largely oriented toward sexual pleasure, and you can tell by the popular use of double entendres and bawdy humor. But for highbrow aesthetes, sexual pleasure is “savage” or “sinful,” and thus lacking in value. Moral disgust with double entendres and references to sexuality was at the core of the abstract academic critique of rhythm and blues and rock and roll. Mingus and other beboppers like Gillespie often used technical academic language in their dismissal of rock and roll, but what it boiled down to was that for them, singing about girdles was morally offensive and simply low rent. There was no room for irony or bawdy humor in the “serious” modernist discourse of the beboppers. In other words, all the fancy language of academic music theory that was employed by jazz musicians to signify the supposed “simplicity” of the structure of rock and roll songs and the general “backwardness” of rhythm and blues music was in reality code for bourgeois moral disgust with working class culture. Moral disgust with the working class, in short, was *displaced* through the language of music theory.

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[179] Mingus' words appear in Eric Porter's book, *What is the Thing Called Jazz* (UC Press, Berkeley) 2002.

Because Mingus – like Dizzy before him - appealed to highbrow sensibilities as a means to break down racism in music, that meant necessarily – even if it was unconscious - that *class* distinction and discrimination was a *goal to be achieved*. He felt that he had to breakdown the conventional separation of jazz and classical music, because he thought, rightly so, that the two genres were unjustly kept separate by racism, which stifled the potential “advancement” of music. Mingus was searching for the “true” emotions of the inner self, and the “true” essence of music, and he felt the racial coding of “good” music as either jazz or classical got in the way of pursuing the advancement of music beyond racialized categories. For Mingus, the way to get beyond racialized categories was to appropriate the bourgeois aesthetic form and expand it as a means to include black musicians.

The core of what I refer to, as a bourgeois aesthetic is the removal of the body and the belief in "progress." The search for "true emotions of inner self" required dismissing the body, or bodily pleasure as merely transient pleasure, an activity understood to be for immature individuals, and below the sensibilities of legitimate, "mature" artists. Mingus' aesthetic modernism that valued Mind over Body framed his point of view about pursuing the "universal" characteristics of music, and he thought he was finding parallels in the two genres as a way to get to a place free of racial markers and restrictions. "Today," Mingus said, "musicians in all races are proving that no race is endowed with special abilities for any profession and that every musician has an equal chance if given the proper start and study needed for playing *correctly…one day it will no longer be necessary for a musician to jump up and down on a drum or dance on a bandstand to receive recognition of his talent* [emphasis mine][180]." "One day," implies that the history of music is linear, and it inevitably gets better; hence, "progress." For Mingus and Dizzy then, breaking down racial difference, while *creating* clas*s* difference were the twin goals of "advancing" music. There was no contradiction for Mingus to argue for racial equality on the one hand, and distancing himself from working class "clowns" on the other because it signified "progress" in the steady march of musical history.

Elected officials in the American Federation of Musicians echoed the aesthetic elitism of the beboppers and jazz musicians in general. For example, William Everett Samuels who was Secretary Treasurer of Local 208 (the "colored" Chicago local) from

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[180] Ibid., p 106-107.

1931-1955, referred to rock and roll music as "crap[181]." Just as in the case of Mingus, Samuels used the metaphorical language of high and low regions on the body to make sense of good and bad music. "Bad" music was any music that is associated with bodily pleasure, and metaphors that emphasized the lower regions of the human body like "girdles," or "shit" were used as a way to create class distance between good musicians and bad musicians. It was an appropriation of the classic bourgeois dualism: Body = bad, Mind=good. Samuels went so far as to argue that rock and roll music, as well as the musicians belonged in the toilet.

Like Mingus, Samuels was active in the effort to integrate the musicians' union and his efforts were part of the successful drive to integrate the white and black locals in Chicago, Local 208 and Local 10, and in this case too, bourgeois aesthetic sensibilities made integration easier. The discourse of aesthetic elitism overlapped with the union's identity as a craft union of skilled workers (musicians). For Samuels, the crucial aspect of being a "good" musician is the ability to read music, and since most rock and roll musicians of his era did not read music they were considered second-class musicians. Speaking about his experience working in Chicago, Samuels discussed the apparently straightforward separation of musicians into "good" and "bad" performers. "I never had to search hard for good musicians," claimed Samuels.

> I knew where all the good ones were. Musicians always know one another. They're cliquey. They got their little cliques. I was looking for musicians who could read and play anything I wanted them to play. I was very lucky in that respect. Most of the musicians in my era could read music. Most of the pop

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[181] See Donald Spivey, *Union and the Black Musician: The Narrative of William Everett Samuels and Chicago Local 208*, (Univeristy Press of America, Lanham, MD) 1984. p 41.

> [rock] artists today don't read music. See, it was a different era. We didn't have that *rock and roll crap*. You had to play; you had to be able to play, to read. If you didn't you just got you a job as a porter or something and got by the best way you could. They [rock and roll musicians] would work, but they would work in *second-class* places. We've always had *cheaper* places like taverns. We called 'em *toilets*… The city doesn't have a *cultural* life anymore. Fewer and fewer places every year. The main places are from North Michigan Avenue from the river back on down to the Drake Hotel, down Michigan Ave., they've got all those big fine hotels; they all got good music in 'em… They have that *rock'n'roll crap* over there on Wells Street in Old Town. But back over on this side they have some pretty good music; and you *don't have any trouble* [emphasis mine][182].

The price paid for racial integration and solidarity within the American Federation of Musicians was the institutionalization of first and second-class musicians. In some ways, the AFM was following in the tradition of exclusion that marks the history of craft unions in the American labor movement. "Skilled" workers in craft unions in America have never been concerned with the plight of "unskilled" workers. On the contrary, the exclusion of potential members on the basis of "skill" has been a strategy to maintain high levels of demand for "skilled" labor[183]. The problem for the AFM was that the demand for jazz and classical music was in sharp decline by the late 1940s and their adherence to an exclusionist craft mentality prevented them from organizing so-called "unskilled" rock and roll musicians. In short, their craft union strategy of exclusion, combined with their aesthetic elitism which *legitimated* their practice of exclusion cost them dearly because rock and roll and the music industry passed them by like a fast moving freight train. I discuss this issue in more detail in the last chapter.

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[182] Ibid., p 37.

[183] For an excellent discussion of the serious limitations of craft union tactics see Jonathan Cutler's and Stanley Aronowitz's essay "Quitting Time," in *Post-Work*, edited by Cutler and Aronowitz (Routlegde, New York) 1998.

While, for the AFM exclusion of musicians on the basis of “skill” was seen as an organizing goal to be achieved, for the beboppers the dismissal of blues music was understood in terms of educating and lifting up black Americans. In other words, beboppers thought they were *including* the Other by moving the rural black audience up into middle class through providing them with a taste of upwardly mobile culture. Even if Southern black listening audience remained poor economically, at least they would have accrued some cultural capital by developing an ear for “good” music. The competition from jump blues musicians, however, was viewed as a problem in the bebop scheme of things. Jump blues musicians were seen an impediment to the strategy of educating the masses, because jump blues music was “simple’ music that was “sexual” in orientation, and it was seen to play into and perpetuate racist stereotypes, while distracting the rural audience from the more “serious” work of developing a bourgeois taste. Gillespie, Mingus, Monk, Parker and the bebop generation struggled to find a way to combine the efforts of resisting the racism in the music industry and “educating” the Southern black masses that were viewed as a drag on the cultural progress of African Americans as a whole. As upwardly mobile, urban middle class professionals, bebop musicians struggled against what they saw as the music industry’s perpetuation of the stereotype of the “illiterate Negro,” guitar or banjo in tow, singing lewd lyrics to an unlettered audience. Southern working class blacks were also seen by the beboppers as partly responsible for the reproduction of degrading stereotypes. As southern blacks made their way north during the great migration, they brought their tastes with them, creating a demand for jump blues music in urban areas.

Jump blues musicians, as Trenier describes in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, performed rowdy shows. They jumped around on stage, shouted to the audience in the call and response tradition of African American music, and sang about getting drunk, having sex and getting into brawls with the cops. The tenor saxophonist Cliff "King" Solomon and vocalist/alto player Gigi Gryce, for instance, had a big hit with "But Officer" a rowdy tune about a drunk guy getting into a confrontation with a cop after being pulled over for drunk driving. The lyrics are quite funny and they go back and forth with a honky saxophone:

> But Officer! That is my real name…
> (Saxophone riff)
> But Officer! I keep telling you that is my real name…
> (sax)
> But Officer! I can't get my hands no higher!
> (Sax)
> Why Officer! I can walk a straight line.
> (Sax)
> But Officer! That was a straight line.
> (Sax)
> Look here Officer, will you let me get one line in.
> (Sax)
> But Officer, I mean Lucifer, I mean Mr. Police…Hey don't close that door
> (Sax)
> Hey, let me outta here!!![184]

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[184] Solomon's "But Officer!" appears in the box set by Okeh records, *The Okeh Rhythm and Blues Story 1949-1957* (Sony Music, New York) 1993.

It was precisely these aspects of jump blues that bebop musicians criticized. For the bebop musicians, the sight of black musicians jumping around on stage, making funny faces and shouting about things like drinking, fighting with the police and having sex perpetuated racist stereotypes that white audiences had come to expect from black performers. Beboppers didn't see the irony of these representations because their modernist discursive field framed music in terms that excluded irony and satiric humor. Beboppers thought that the jump blues musicians were conforming to the racist media representations of black people as dumb, silly, sex-crazed, drunk, happy-go-lucky buffoons. It was these representations that Gillespie referred to as "shameful." Ironically, Gigi Gryce was an academically trained musician. He attended the Boston Conservatory on a Fulbright Scholarship. He also worked as a session musician on recordings for Dizzy Gillespie and Thelonius Monk. Gryce was one of the few rank and file members of the musicians' union who had no moral qualms about rhythm and blues or rock and roll, and his vocals work on "But, Officer!" remains a classic from that era.

The shame expressed by Dizzy was not exclusive to bebop musicians. On the contrary, the sense of shame regarding blues music was prevalent among the political and cultural leadership of the African American community in the 1940s. Danny Baker, a jazz guitarist from Harlem described an incident that took place in Harlem in 1938 when Eleanor Roosevelt appeared at a political rally hosted by the black leadership of Harlem. According to Barker, when Eleanor Roosevelt was on stage with Walter White (Executive Secretary of the NAACP), Bill Robinson, Mary McLeod Bethune (founder of the National Council of Negro Women), Marian Anderson (the famous opera singer), and other black leaders, somebody had hijacked a truck from the Savoy Ballroom that was outfitted with a loudspeaker system and then drove by the platform at a deliberately slow speed so that everybody, including the First Lady, could hear a song over the loud speakers attached to the truck. The song was the infamous "Don't You Feel My Legs," by Blue Lu Barker, the sultry blues singer who was popular in the working class community. Other controversial and popular recordings by Blue Lu included, "You've Got to Show it To Me, Baby," "I'll Give You Some Tomorrow," "Loan Me Your Husband," and "I Feel Like Laying in Another Woman's Husband's Arms." According to Baker's account,

> He slowed down the truck and he passed by mischievously, and finally went by. And you could hear, 'Listen to that filthy record…' 'It's filthy!' 'Get that record!' Somebody shouted, 'Stop the truck and get that record!' Some people were laughing; some of them were embarrassed: a song like this showed the vulgarity of the black mind. It was a disgrace. Yet at their houses, probably half of them had that record, and played it at their parties. But they said, 'Get that record![185]'

Barker's account reveals the complexity of the situation faced by bebop musicians and the cultural and political leadership of the black community in America during the 1940s. Beboppers and the black bourgeoisie felt a responsibility for lifting up the black working class, at least culturally, if not also economically. Bebop musicians had, by their professional middle class status, proven the lie to the racist stereotype of the uneducated or "uneducatable" Negro. But as Barker points out, there was a certain amount of disingenuousness in their appropriation of white bourgeois norms. Barker points out that the people who were ashamed of Blue Lu in the presence of Eleanor Roosevelt were likely to have her records in their collection at home.

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[185] The quote from Baker appears in Deveux, page 344.

Appropriating white bourgeois norms was not, however, a sustainable strategy for creating solidarity in the black community. AFM delegate, Milt Hinton, whose club gave birth to bebop, even admitted as much when he said it was a "lost cause" trying to educate the black working class. The best they could hope for was that the "best and brightest" among African Americans could become upwardly mobile. According to Hinton,

> Trying to educate the Southern black people…[was like fighting a losing battle]…all they wanted was dirty records…old dirty blues…So they didn't dig [our music]…I guess I got the idea [of educating the black working class] from Cab [Calloway] that this kind of thing [blues music] kept the black mind in the South down…The music we played was completely different from what blacks usually heard. In most Southern towns there'd be a small radio station catering to a black audience. The music they'd play was real trash-blues, but with lyrics that had sexual messages. 'You god bad blood, mama, I think you need a shot,' 'Now my needle's in you, honey,' those kinds of lines…Southern black people seemed to be kept ignorant, poor and fighting among themselves[186].

Beboppers had earnestly appropriated white bourgeois morality, and it framed their strategy for racial "equality" in the music industry. Racial equality, at least in the specific ways in which it was pursued by beboppers, black professionals and the black bourgeoisie, involved *creating* class inequality. Racial equality and class inequality were two sides of the same coin, and each was a goal to be achieved. In the end, "educating" and "lifting" up the black audience was a euphemism for an upward mobility for a select few musicians.

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[186] Ibid., page 345.

Louis Jordan was frequently attacked by bebop musicians for these reasons as well. Among his repertoire of stage antics, Jordan had developed a character called "Deacon Jones" that he would play during the performance of his tunes. Deacon Jones was also the name of one of his hit tunes. As part of the character, Jordan wore gigantic white plastic glasses, a top hat, a silly looking tie and suit. Jordan also made lots of funny faces while playing the Deacon Jones character. Beboppers were ashamed of these kinds of antics. Jordan learned his stagecraft when he was a performer for W.C. Handy's traveling minstrel show in the South before coming to work for Chick Webb's orchestra in New York City in the late 1930s. Musicians in minstrel shows were as much entertainers as they were musicians, because the minstrel shows were variety shows. Because of his Southern background many of the members in Webb's band accused Jordan of being an "Uncle Tom," and many musicians working in New York referred to him behind his back as "Stepin' Fetchit[187]."

Unlike in Europe, the history of minstrelsy in America is marred by racism. Minstrelsy in America became popular in the 1830s when Thomas Rice, a white entertainer, dressed up in "black face" and performed a song that he had first heard from a black stable hand named "Jim Crow," the same name that would be used to describe the racist legal establishment that created segregation in the South after Reconstruction. As a result of Rice's performances, minstrel shows became a very popular form of entertainment for the white working class in America, and the entertainers were by and large also from working class backgrounds. Minstrel shows were a key component in the creation of identity and solidarity among the white working class in America. White entertainers dressed up in black face performed caricatures of blacks, including the infamous "plantation darky" character. These racist performances helped establish "whiteness" as an identity in America because they ridiculed blacks as an "out-group"[188].

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[187] See John Chilton's account in his book *Let the Good Times Roll: The Story of Louis Jordan and His Music* (Michigan University Press, Ann Arbor) 1997. p 52

After the Civil War, black performers established their own minstrel groups and they continued to perform racist stereotypes as a way to attract a white audience to their shows. These performances split the black community between those who thought it was necessary to attract a white audience in order to then change the expectations of the white audience and those who thought it was a mistake to play to the expectations of racist whites even if it was a temporary ploy to be used as a means to educate the white audience and break down traditional stereotypes. Bebop musicians vehemently resented performances by Jordan on these grounds.

WC Handy's generation of musicians came of age in the 1890s, and Handy struggled with a conflicting desire to attract a mass audience (which meant whites in addition to blacks) while breaking free from racist constrictions. Handy argued that to attract a mass audience required, at least in the short run, that black musicians play to the expectations of a racist white audience. Handy coined a phrase "Our Hokum Hooked Them," to describe the strategy of deploying tactics that could be viewed as conforming to racist stereotypes in order to attract an audience. Handy recounts that he used to have his musicians stage a fake fight amongst themselves as a means to attract white onlookers, then had his actors stop fighting and begin playing his music. Eventually,

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[188] For a detailed discussion of minstrel shows in the construction of whiteness, see David Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (Verso, New York) 1991.

Handy won over his white audience to the music. Handy referred to the tactic as the "musician's strike[189]." While Handy was conflicted about performing stereotypes, he insisted that he was always using irony, an irony that Jordan appropriated, and the beboppers misunderstood.

In defense of himself, Jordan said that the people in his audience who laughed the loudest at his stage antics were African Americans, not whites. Jordan also was not ashamed of being an "entertainer" as well as a musician. Jordan said, "See, before I got a band, I knew what I wanted to do with it. I wanted to give my whole life to making people enjoy my music. Make them laugh and smile. So I didn't stick to what you'd call jazz. I have always stuck to entertainment[190]." In another interview he talked about how he didn't take part in the aloofness of the beboppers. "I really wanted to be an entertainer," said Jordan. "I wanted to play for millions, not just a few hepcats…Those guys [beboppers] really wanted to play mostly for themselves, and I still wanted to play for the people. I just like to sing my blues and swing[191]." While Jordan made a distinction between his music and bebop jazz, he never spoke disparagingly about the bebop musicians. On the contrary, he liked and respected bebop. "Like bebop?" Jordan asked during an interview in 1948, "Man, I love it…You know Dizzy Gillespie's my boy. I worked with him back when I was with Chick Webb[192]." Jordan was a fan of bebop but he didn't perform much of it during his live gigs, preferring not to interrupt the shuffle rhythms that made him famous. Some of the bebop musicians who played with his band, however, resented him for those very reasons. The tenor saxophonist, Paul Quinichette, who played a few gigs with Jordan, referred to Jordan as a “dictator with ‘Uncle Tom’ qualities. “I hated all the time I was with him,” recounted Quinichette in an interview. “I didn’t like the kind of thing he was doing, it wasn’t jazz. I think Louis was a *prelude to this rock thing*. I didn’t like those tunes [Emphasis mine][193].”

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[189] See Karen Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race: Black Cultural Politics before the Harlem Renaissance, 1893-1915* (forthcoming).

[190] Ibid, p 65.

[191] Jordan's account appears in DeVeux, p 342.

[192] Ibid., p 143.

Jordan’s comedy and stage antics were always full of irony, which was lost on the beboppers. According to Jordan his audience was usually “too damn busy laughing at me, and at themselves, to make any complaints.” Jordan was aware of how middle class urban dwellers felt about rural working class folk, and he knew how to make them laugh at caricatures of country people. But he also knew how to make fun of “sophisticated” urbanites, and poke fun at them when he played for working class rural audiences. Jordan always pointed at class distinctions with irony, signifying in ways that took sides with the working class against the snobbery of highbrow elitists. Jordan used irony as a form of covert resistance, a tradition going way back in African American culture to the trickster tales, stories about slaves fooling their unsuspecting masters by deploying irony, exaggeration and deception[194]. In a typical trickster tale from this genre, a slave pretends to be stupid as a means to escape from their master who turns out to be the stupid one because they [the masters] can’t imagine slaves being clever enough to fool them.

Because Jordan’s humor used irony on both sides, his performances deconstructed rather than perpetuated stereotypes of working class folks, black and white. Jordan’s point was to break down stereotypes by using ironic humor and joking on them. Aaron Izenhall, who played trumpet for Louis Jordan, described the controversy between

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[193] Ibid., p 144.

[194] African American trickster tales entered American popular culture with the publication of Charles Waddell Chestnutt’s story, “The Goopherd Grapevine,” that was first published by the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1887. For an extended academic discussion on the issue see Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey* (Oxford, 1989).

Quinichette and Jordan in an interview. According to Izenhall, "Paul Quinichette and those bebop disciples didn't like the idea of wearing really bright, wild-colored clothing and moving around while they played, or putting on a show[195]." Quinichette didn't see any irony in Jordan's outrageous on stage antics, or in his bawdy lyrics, but other musicians and performers did understand. Years later, Sammy Davis Jr., who performed with Louis Jordan, said, "Louis Jordan was the first recording artist to project the life and situations of the Black Community on records with *humor and dignity*. I and many others like me have dropped nickel after nickel in the jukebox to enjoy his messages in song and monologue. Mr. Louis Jordan is the original soul brother[196]. [emphasis mine]" Indeed, many of Jordan's tunes make you laugh. The content of the lyrics and the call and response story telling technique are irresistibly funny. In a hilarious tune called "Open the Door, Richard," Jordan sings about the "embarrassing" predicament of a "well respected man" being seen with his drunk friends out on the streets late at night.

> I met old zeke standin on the corner the other day. Talkin' to some guy named Richard
> that cat sure was booted with the liqour.
> What did you say?
> he was abnoxicated.
> What did you say?
> he was, uh, inebriated.
> What did you say?
> well, he was just plain drunk.
> well, alright then!
> …
> he was sure salty with the bartender.
> the bartender's tryin to make him by another drink.

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[195] Ibid,., p 145.

[196] Sammy Davis Jr.'s account appears in the liner notes of Louis Jordan's album, *Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five: 1946-1947* (Classics Records, France) 1998.

> zeke told the bartender,
> there ain't no need of me buyin no drinks when everyone else is buyin them.
> i'm goin to drink to everybody else's health, till I ruin my own.
>
> Open the door Richard!
> Why he don't know who he's throwin' out that joint
> I outta go back in that joint with a stick and bust it down to the ground
> Open the door, Richard!
> …
> but I hate to be caught out on the street like this because it makes you seem so common,
> and I know I ain't common cause I got class I ain't never used.
> but I guess I better get on in the house cause I don't want my pastor to catch me out on the street like this.
> open the door, Richard!
>
> now look at that old woman across the street, stuck her head out the window
> tis everybody's business in the neighborhood
> done stuck her head outta the window callin her sister.
> look at her callin' her sister and her sister sayin, 'ain't that him, ain't that him?'
> yes it's me, and i'm drunk again!!
> Hey Richard, open the door!

In the same tune, Jordan also talks about owing back rent to his land lord.

> she can't throw him out cause I owe just as much back rent as he does.
> imagine that old woman chargin us three dollars a month and gettin mad cause we 12 months in the arrears.
> come meetin me last Thursday sayin,
> 'ain't you boys goin to give me some back rent?'
> I told her she'd be lucky if she got some *front* rent[197].

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[197] Ibid.

Of course Jordan was actually making fun of the morally uptight people who might be appalled at the thought of people stayin' out late, getting drunk, having sex and getting into fights. Jordan was the master of ironic humor. In the lyrics to "Open The Door, Richard," Jordan points to class as a marker of distinction through irony as a way to signify an awareness class subordination while resisting it through the deployment of humor. Jordan was well aware that elitist snobs looked down their noses at his music and he makes a reference to the issue when he says in the lyrics to "Open the Door": "I know I ain't common, cuz I got class I ain't never used." Notice how he claims to have "class" while using the word "ain't," which is usually understood to be "incorrect" English. Working class people use the word "ain't," but that would violate bourgeois morality. It's his way of poking fun at the conservative establishment. In other words, Jordan's use of humor, which is part of a rich working class tradition, is a way of letting the bourgeoisie know that the working class is aware of how they [bourgeoisie] *use* culture in an attempt to subordinate the working class, and further, that the working class always resists subordination by fighting within the terrain of culture, by forging alternative, oppositional perspectives on the world and how to live in it.

Cultural distinctions between highbrow and lowbrow art legitimates –in ideology - class stratification in the economic and political realm because it places responsibility for class stratification on individuals rather than the structure or system of class relations. Highbrow and lowbrow are terms that were used originally to refer to the shape of the skull, which is supposed to be a signifier of intelligence. According to the bourgeois ideology, "dumb" people are poor because they are dumb and “smart” people are wealthy because they are smart[198]. Bourgeois ideology also claims that the working class cultural emphasis on the body and bodily pleasure is a result of a lack of intelligence.

In addition to the appropriation of techniques of humor and irony from the African American tradition of trickster tales, Jordan’s music is part of a long tradition in the American working class (black and white), a tradition of working people insisting on the right to have leisure time and a resistance to middle class attempts to make workers “respectable” by taking away leisure activities. Capitalists have always had a problem getting workers to accept a life of drudgery working in factories, and the struggle to get workers to accept factory work has been a struggle to get workers to give up their leisure and their culture[199]. It’s a fight that still goes on today. Jordan’s humorous descriptions of the travails of working class life made sense to his audience and that’s why he was so popular with blacks and whites among the U.S. working class. “Open the Door, Richard,” sold millions of copies and was one of the most frequently played singles in jukeboxes across America. Jordan never gave in to the moralizing guilt trips he was subjected to by his elitist peers working in the music industry, but the beboppers’ attack on Louis Jordan and the Trenier Twins was a prelude of things to come. When rock and roll took the country by storm, the jazz musicians and the musicians’ union once again launched a “moral” attack on the new music. In the

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[198] For the most recent example of the age old argument that poor people are poor because they are unintelligent, see Hernstein and Murray, *The Bell-Curve* (?) and for an extended discussion on this issue of high and low culture, see Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow, Lowbrow* (Harvard?)

[199] For a good historical analysis of working class resistance to the discipline of the clock and factory life in general, see Jonathan Prude’s essay, “The Social System of Early New England Textile Mills,” in *The New England Working Class and the New Labor History*, edited by Herbert Gutman (Urbana University of Illinois Press 1987) pp 90-127..

1950s, the attack on rock and roll intensified as jazz musicians sought a public forum to bash rock and roll. On of these forums was provided by *Downbeat* magazine.

Between 1955 and 1956, *Downbeat* magazine published a series of articles on the "problem" of rock and roll music in America. Jazz musicians and band-leaders, most of whom were members of the American Federation of Musicians, used the magazine to hold a forum on the pros and (mostly) cons of the "new" music. By 1955, rock and roll music had taken over the *Billboard* charts. Jump blues hits had been on the charts since 1946, but rock and roll didn't appear on the charts until Bill Haley's single "Crazy, Man, Crazy" broke the Billboard "hot 100" charts in 1953. It was basically the same music in 1953 as it was in 1946, but the electric guitar had displaced the saxophone and white musicians were playing it more frequently, which was one of the main reasons for the name change to "rock and roll." In 1953 the market for rhythm and blues (formerly race music) was only 6% of the market and country music (formerly hillbilly music) was just 9% of the market. All that would change in a few short years, however, as the two genres collided to produce rock and roll, a newly named genre that would conquer popular music. In 1955 Haley's single "Rock Around the Clock" occupied the charts for 24 weeks, and Chuck Berry's "Maybellene" went to number 1 on the R & B charts and number 5 on the "hot 100" singles (the pop charts). By 1956, Elvis had the first, second, sixth, 14th and 15th spots on Billboard's top 50 singles. Also in the top 50 for 1955 and 1956 were Little Richard, Fats Domino, Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins and Gene Vincent.

The issue for the union musicians involved in the discussions in *Downbeat* was nothing less than the future of music in America. What would become of bebop jazz and big band music? Would rock and roll last? Or, was it just a fad, and if so, how was it possible that it could be so popular? While there were many disagreements about what was “wrong” with music in America, all the union musicians involved in the discussion agreed that rhythm and blues and/or rock and roll music was seriously lacking in value[200]. No matter what specific explanations were used for why rock and roll had become so popular, there was universal agreement that rock and roll was *not* good music. The question for the musicians featured in *Downbeat* was how jazz musicians in America should respond to rock and roll, and how they would figure out who was to blame for the rise in popularity of rock and roll.

One of the first union musicians in the *Downbeat* forum was Les Elgart, a long-time member of the AFM. Elgart made a name for himself as a trumpet player in the Woody Herman orchestra in the 1940s and in the 1950s Elgart became a band leader in his own right. Elgart’s big band was among the last of the bands in the U.S. that played in the style of the swing era. When interviewed for the March 23, 1955 issue of *Downbeat*, Elgart referred to rock and roll as “something that will just have to run its course, like an epidemic.” The labeling of rock and roll music as an “epidemic,” “disease,” or “social pathology” would become a widespread mantra among the conservative establishment in America during the 1950s, and many union musicians joined in the chorus of conservative assaults on the “new” music using those very terms. But the union musicians’ criticisms of rock and roll went beyond dismissing it on the grounds that it was popular among “undesirable” elements in society, because musicians coded their moral attacks on rock and roll by basing them on technical grounds as well, through arguments that were based in formalism, the dominant point of view in music theory at the time. Musicians agreed with conservative critics that rock and roll attracted delinquents and deadbeats, but they also attacked the structural elements of the songs themselves.

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[200] For the purposes of this discussion, I’ll use rhythm and blues and rock and roll interchangeably since the musicians I discuss do the same. There are historical reasons for making a distinction between the two terms, and I cover those reasons in the previous chapter.

The arguments against rock and roll that appeared in *Downbeat* were similar to the attacks led by beboppers against rhythm and blues a few years earlier, but this time they reached a broader audience and the attack against rock and roll was an attack against black *and* white working class musicians and fans, whereas the attack on blues and rhythm and blues in the late 1940s had targeted Southern black musicians and audience almost exclusively. By the time *Downbeat* took the jazz musicians' criticisms of rock and roll public, the issue was more clearly a class issue, since by the mid 1950s rock and roll had crossed the color line for both musicians and audience. While the racial integration of the audience for rock and roll was still controversial, especially in the South, from the point of view of jazz musicians, rock and roll was simply trash, equally white and black trash.

Bourgeois morality continued to be coded in the language of music theory, and union musicians continued to insist that they possessed the authority to act as arbiters of taste in America. According to Elgart, rhythm blues/rock n roll was an extremely simple music that, for him, led inevitably to boredom and he predicted that rock and roll would be a temporary, passing fad. "The rhythm and blues," argued Elgart, "is so limited that they [kids] get over it in a hurry. It ceases to be exciting to them in no time at all[201]." As was the case with the beboppers and the Southern black audience, union musicians were hoping to convince all American consumers of music that rock and roll was worthless, and to do so required that union musicians "educate" the masses and expose them to "good" music that was played with proper technique.

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[201] *Downbeat* magazine, March 23, 1955 p. 1.

The attack on rock and roll by union musicians continued the following year, and *Downbeat* again provided the forum. By 1956, Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Fats Domino, Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis and Bill Haley were still firmly in charge of the music charts and it seemed, unfortunately for the discussants in *Downbeat*, like rock and roll wasn't going away any time soon. That year *Downbeat* ran an article titled, "Musicians Argue the Value of Rock and Roll," and several famous AFM members jumped at the opportunity to bash rock and roll. The list of union musicians lined up to blast away at rock and roll included Benny Goodman, the famous band leader from the swing era, Thad Jones from the brass section of the Count Basie orchestra, bassist Milt Hinton and pianist Billy Taylor (who played with Ben Webster). Taylor was the harshest, claiming that

> It's [rock and roll] musically trite. It's obviously gimmicked up with old boogie-woogie phrases, pseudo-Spanish rhythms, recurring triplets *ad nauseum*. The melodies are repetitious…Harmonically, a lot of it is incorrectly written, and worse than that, incorrectly played[202].

Taylor was among those who believed that rock and roll was a fake, a music that was "invented" by suspect "independent" record label owners looking to make an easy buck through exploiting impressionable teen-agers who weren't aware they were being duped, because, unlike himself, they were not trained in music theory. Teenagers were framed as victims who were not aware they were being exploited by rock and roll. "Let me repeat," said Taylor, "that this R&B [rock and roll] taste was created; it didn't come spontaneously from the teenagers. It grew out of the race records and since then has been getting progressively worse musically. They took the worst parts of that music…and capitalized on them[203].” It’s telling that Taylor mentioned the term “race,”(in race records), which was a label used by the music industry for black music, in particular the blues. Blues music was for the most part shunned by both the major record labels and the musicians’ union until the folk music revival of the early 1960s finally legitimated blues music in the eyes of the musical establishment. “Bad” music, or in the words of Billy Taylor, “trite” music, was always code for Southern black and white working class music, what Jerry Wexler, founder of *Elektra* records calls “southern proletarian music.” The irony is that Taylor himself is African-American. In the case of Taylor’s dismissal of rock and roll, class is displaced through race. In other words, his assault on “race” music was grounded in class distinction: he was distancing himself and “good” musicians in general from what he saw as the garbage of rock and roll music, regardless of whether or not is was being performed by white or black musicians. Perhaps Taylor thought there were some redeeming aspects to the older “race” music, but they didn’t find their way into rock and roll. Taylor himself was formally trained in academic music departments. He earned a PhD in music from the University of Massachusetts, and for a few years, he was the house pianist at Birdland in New York City. Taylor’s attack on rock and roll was influenced by his academic training in formalism, and that particular theoretical paradigm structured his point of view on popular music. Ultimately his academic training prevented him from understanding rock and roll, as was the case for most musicians who appealed to the technical language of formalism in their attacks on rock and roll.

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[202] "Musicians Argue Values of Rock and Roll," *Downbeat* magazine, May 30, 1956 p. 12.

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[203] *Ibid.,*

For union musicians like those who voiced their opinions in *Downbeat*, rock and roll didn't really count as music because it didn't measure up to the so-called standards of proper harmonic structure. Since it was not considered music, union musicians referred to rock and roll as "entertainment." Hal Espinosa, who is now the President of AFM local 47, in Los Angeles, told me that when he was a young rank and file member of the union that "we [the union musicians] didn't consider rock and roll performers to be legitimate musicians. We considered them more as entertainers… We also thought rock and roll was a passing fad[204]." The onstage antics of Little Richard pounding on his piano and Elvis' infamous gyrating pelvis involved "non-musical" elements in their performances, and it was for these reasons – the dancing and "crazy" behavior – that union musicians claimed that rock and roll performers were not "serious" musicians; they were entertainers.

When Elvis traveled to New York to appear on the Ed Sullivan Show, the Steve Allen Show and Saturday Night Bandstand, union musicians in New York, including most infamously, Tommy Dorsey, greeted him with extraordinary hostility. Music producer Quincy Jones told one account of the episode. According to Jones,

> I remember writing arrangements for the Tommy Dorsey band for his television show, Saturday Night Bandstand. And one night this little kid from Memphis came and sang on the show and the band was pissed off. They [Dorsey's band] couldn't play with each other or get into a groove with Elvis or whatever. Sam Phillips [the owner of Sun Records, the label that first broke Elvis] said we'll send for the band in Memphis [guitarist Scotty Moore and bassist Bill Black Elvis' own band mates] and they came back up and played on the show. Tommy was upset

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[204] Interview with the author, April, 2003. President Espinosa also told me that the union realized now that they made a big mistake with rock and roll and that the union has been making a serious effort in recent years to appeal more to younger rock musicians. I discuss this issue in the last chapter.

> and he said this guy [Elvis] won't last. He'll be out of here tomorrow. Then 8,000 letters from Elvis' fans came in and Elvis played on the show til it closed[205].

In retrospect, of course, we know that rock and roll was not a fad, but in the mid 1950s the mindset among jazz musicians was the opposite. Tommy Dorsey had enormous success as a big band leader for more than two decades, and it was inconceivable to him that a "country hick" from Memphis would topple him, especially on his own show. Elvis' trip to New York by himself to sing in front of Dorsey's band was similar to the experience Jimmy Rodgers had a generation earlier, when Rodgers was asked to leave his band at home in Tennessee to record with union musicians in New York. In both cases union musicians in New York were frustrated by singers/guitar players who came from the South, because they couldn't find a way to play in the style of the southern musicians. As was the case with Rodgers, the union musicians blamed Elvis for the incompatibility between the styles of music. After all, it couldn't be the fault of "trained" musicians in the union. If the northern union musicians couldn't play Elvis' music, it was because southern music was "incorrect" in its structure or form. The Tommy Dorsey band was used to playing behind singers like Frank Sinatra, who stuck to mainstream conventions. Elvis' off color, off beat style was foreign to Dorsey and his band, which demonstrated an incommensurability of sorts between the two genres. Elvis' infamous hips didn't help the matter either.

In spite of Elvis' popularity, famous jazz musicians in the rank and file of the musicians' union continued to believe that sooner or later the American public would catch on and realize that rock and roll was not any good, and then musicians and audience could return to the halcyon days of jazz, both big band and bebop. The key for jazz musicians in the union was to keep hammering away at the so-called musical inferiority of rock and roll. Taylor's claim that rock and roll was harmonically incorrect and jazz bassist Milt Hinton's claim that rhythm and blues "is pretty bad, pretty crude," betrayed the elitism of many union musicians as well as their unwillingness to pay serious attention to rock and roll music. When the writers of *Downbeat* asked Benny Goodman to comment on rock and roll, he gave them a dirty look, "raised-eyebrows and mouth turned down." The writers did make a point, however, of conveying Goodman's negative opinions about rock and roll through their own paraphrasing.

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[205] Quincy's quote appears in the video documentary series, *The History of Rock and Roll* (?).

Of course, not all members of the AFM were against rock and roll music, but there wasn't a single AFM member who came to the defense of rock and roll in the forums that took place in the trade magazines in the 1950s. Many famous union musicians attacked rock and roll publicly, but there were *none* who made a case in favor of rock and roll. It was a completely one-sided discussion: rock and roll was trash.

The irony of the discussion in *Downbeat* was completely lost on the participants, because none of those involved in the discursive assault on rock n roll had anything to say about the fact that *their own music*, jazz, was the subject of similar attacks just a couple of generations earlier. In fact, the same high/low aesthetic divide used as a means to dismiss of ragtime/jazz, and country music was again dragged out of the closet to be used on rock n roll. Race and class distinctions were once again filtered through a highbrow aesthetic designed to marginalize rock n roll as lowbrow music lacking value, and once again high/low (good/bad) was code for white/black and middle class/working class[206]. The assault on rock and roll was the latest chapter in the struggle between the upholders of "high" culture and the supposed heathens at the gates. The script had changed very little, and the attacks on rock and roll were just as ludicrous as the attacks on ragtime/jazz and country music during the previous two generations. It was as if the union musicians were acting out – of course without any sense for irony - Marx's maxim: "history repeats itself the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce."

Just as was the case when union musicians attacked ragtime music and jazz a few generations earlier, most union musicians *knew very little* about rock and roll. They made extraordinary attempts to take the high road and display their "superior" skills and knowledge through the deployment of the language of music formalism, but there was rarely any particular referent that corresponded to their criticisms. The criticisms were almost always blanket attacks on the entire genre of rock and roll, with no specific case mentioned to demonstrate their criticisms. John Lewis, who once played with Dizzy Gillespie, was also the music director of the Modern Jazz Quartet, and he admitted he didn't know anything about rock and roll, but still, he was still eager to pass a negative judgment upon the music he knew little about. "Most of what I've heard," claims Lewis,

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[206] I put "class" in quotes because the musicians' union by definition would under "normal" circumstances be considered working-class. In this case, however, I consider the union to take a conservative cultural position on rock and roll, and since rock and roll is a cultural expression of the working class, I consider the union to be "anti-working" class. In other words, if the issue under consideration is culture, as is the case here, then the musicians' union cannot be considered representative of the working class because their preferred aesthetic was thoroughly bourgeois. On the other hand, another distinction that may overlap here would be the distinction of "skilled" versus "unskilled" worker. There has been much written about how "skilled" workers, mostly white men, have acted against unskilled workers, especially "non-white" workers. There is a long and well documented history of the exclusion of women and "non-white" workers from craft unions controlled by white men. But I don't think the division between "skilled" and "unskilled" workers works in this case because I argue that it is a misnomer to claim that rock and roll musicians were lacking "skills." The AFM, one of the oldest craft unions, does have a history of racism like most craft unions in the United States, but unlike in other industries where "skill" is more or less a straightforward issue, "skill" in the craft of music is a much more complicated issue. Therefore, I resist using categories of "skilled" and "unskilled" in the history of union musicians versus rock and roll musicians.

"has been of very poor quality. *I haven't heard very much of it because I don't care to*." (Emphasis is mine)[207]. It seems paradoxical that union musicians would take pains to use the relatively abstract and technical language of music theory to describe the structural pitfalls of music they knew very little about. In effect, they were applying their abstract criteria to a straw man, and because union musicians knew very little about rock and roll, they were unable to play with people like an Elvis Presley or a Jimmy Rodgers.

The irony does not stop there, because Chuck Berry, who is by many accounts – including mine - the true "King" of rock and roll, was himself a student of jazz and quite comfortable and talented enough to play in the jazz, blues, country and rock and roll idioms. Carl Perkins said that Chuck Berry was the most versatile musician he had ever seen, and that many people who heard Chuck Berry, but had never seen him, thought he was white because he recorded many songs that crossed over into the country genre. Perkins said Berry was perhaps the only black musician who played country music. Berry also played in recording sessions for jazz arrangers and producers, and he says in his autobiography that he studied the style of Charlie Christian very carefully when he [Berry] was a young apprentice in the craft of musicianship. Charlie Christian, of course, was a member of Benny Goodman's swing band, the same Benny Goodman who dismissed rock and roll in the pages of *Downbeat* magazine. It seems odd, in retrospect, that the jazz musicians in *Downbeat* even have had the conversation they did about the merits of rock and roll, because their own idiom, jazz, was continuous in many ways with rock and roll, especially the sophisticated and technical improvisational guitar solos that are the heart and soul of rock and roll. Charlie Christian legitimated the electric guitar through his unique skills and innovations, and it can be argued that his elevation of the electric guitar as a legitimate instrument was a cornerstone in the foundation of rock and roll[208]. How ironic then, that it was Goodman himself who suggested that Christian be featured for guitar solos, including the famous arrangement for "solo flight." Goodman can be given some credit for the development of a music he claimed to despise. We know in hindsight that Chuck Berry is both a skilled composer and arranger of music and a virtuoso on the guitar, but obviously, jazz musicians like Benny Goodman never made the connection between his own band member, Charlie Christian, and Chuck Berry, the godfather of rock and roll. After Charlie Christian, the other electric guitarist who most influenced the development of rock and roll was "Tiny" Grimes who played with Coleman Hawkins and Charlie Parker. In 1946 Grimes cut "Tiny's Boogie" at the WOR studios in New York City, a record that many music historians consider the first rock and roll record. In short, the jazz musicians' critique of rock and roll couldn't be, in reality, based upon skill or technique, because many of the rock and rollers possessed "serious" skills, skills they learned from playing guitar in the jazz idiom. It seems that morality was the issue at hand, not musicianship.

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[207] "Musicians Argue Value of Rock and Roll Music," *Downbeat*, 1956.

The other area of continuity between jazz and rock and roll is the language used by rock and roll musicians and jazz musicians to refer to themselves and their culture. As much as jazz musicians tried to distance themselves from the rock and rollers, the rock and roll musicians, for their part, borrowed much of the language of jazz musicians, especially the Bebop musicians, including terms like "cat," "cool cat," "hepcat," and variously versions of "bop." Elvis, for example, referred to himself and other rockabilly musicians playfully as "Hillbilly Cats," and Carl Perkins used the term cat in his lyrics in

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[208] For a fascinating discussion of Charlie Christian and the history of the electric guitar in rock music see Steve Waksman's *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience*. Waksman made a good choice by putting Chuck Berry on the cover of his book.

Blue Suede Shoes: “go, cat, go!” Perkins also wrote a tune called *Boppin’ the Blues*. Buddy Holly was influenced by Western Swing music, and he referred to his own music as “Western Bop.”

While there was a continuity of sorts between jazz and rock and roll in terms of improvisational technique on the electric guitar, there remained contradictions between jazz and rock and roll, and those contradictions were rooted in opposing class aesthetics. The problem was, in part, a problem of incommensurability between the bourgeois, formalist “paradigm” of academic, or symphonic jazz musicians and classical musicians on the one hand, and the “paradigm” of rock and roll, which developed organically from the leisure spaces of the working class. Formalism can’t adequately make sense of rock and roll, because the form of rock and roll has to do with its content. You can’t understand rock and roll if you depend upon an analysis that separates form from content. In the previous chapter I discussed the working class (black and white) origins of rock and roll, and here I want to emphasize that the everyday life of the working class made its way into the content of rock and roll music, and gave the music a specific form: both in the lyrics and in the structure of the songs.

Formalism, as a method of analysis, divorces a composition from the conditions of its production, or from its context. Or, to be more precise, formalism reifies or “fetishizes” a particular genre of music, namely, western classical music, and then derives principles from that *particular* genre as *the universal* principles for all music and attempts to measure all compositions by standards derived from the particulars of classical music. The attack on rock and roll was virtually the same attack that was waged against ragtime music fifty years earlier. The form of rock and roll compositions strays from the rules of "good" music in similar ways that ragtime did at the turn of the century. Rock and roll pushed the envelop a little further by re-appropriating the techniques of bending or "blueing" notes, and together with the unorthodox use of poly-rhythms, and syncopation and falsetto voicing techniques that strayed from standard techniques of harmonization, created a style of music that is in some sense incompatible with formalism. It was precisely these techniques that Taylor refers to as "incorrectly written, and worse, incorrectly performed."

The features of working class life that made their way into rock and roll include a resistance to alienated labor that dominated life in the factory and an affirmation of leisure time, or life *outside* the factory. It's most obvious in the playful lyrics that emphasize pleasure, and hedonism in leisure activities, including sexual pleasure, but you can also find working class sensibilities in the structure of the songs themselves, including poly-rhythms, syncopation, bending of notes and the off color falsetto singing. For instance, the unique poly-rhythms and unorthodox beats and points of emphasis on blue notes in rock and roll are all, taken collectively, a form of resistance to the strict regulation of factory work based upon adherence to the clock[209]. The rationalization of activity in the factory that was based upon obedience to the clock was turned upside down in the working class leisure spaces of the city and the poly-rhythms and the unorthodox placement of beats in rock and roll provided a playful sense of timing that rejected the regime of the clock in the factory. The use of beats in rock n roll emphasized that time was something created by the musicians, as something they could mold to their desires, whereas time in the factory was an alien phenomenon imposed by "the man" from the outside. How ironic that a labor union of musicians would come to dismiss the organic music of the working class. What made that irony a reality was the fact that the bebop musicians and the American Federation of Musicians as a whole had adopted bourgeois formalism as their aesthetic, and that aesthetic legitimated their craft mentality that excluded "untrained" musicians from their union. The practice of exclusion was legitimated by morality.

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[209] See Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and Popular Culture*.

The attack on rock and roll by union musicians took place mostly in the trade magazines, and the audience for their assault on rock and roll was rather narrow, but their attack on the structural elements of rock and roll coincided with the social backlash against rock and roll in society at large, and while much of the criticism of rock and roll by union musicians was focused on the structure of the music, those criticisms were simply code for the same things that mainstream society was claiming was wrong with rock and roll. In other words, the union musicians were upset about rock and roll for the same reasons that mainstream society was upset: namely, rock and roll was threatening because it represented a working class challenge to the dominant bourgeois norms and mores of society. Musicians in the union might have used the language of abstract music theory, but it was still the working class content of rock and roll that was the core of the "problem."

There were four main reasons why rock and roll was controversial in American society during the 1950s. First, rock and roll undermined sexual mores in society, by emphasizing sexual activities through the use of double entendres in the lyrics of rock and roll songs. Second, rock and roll was seen to promote "juvenile delinquency," which is another way of saying that rock and roll encouraged working class kids to resist authority, especially the kind of authority that preached the moral value of the work ethic, obedience to your employer and delayed gratification. Third, rock and roll was seen as part of a communist plot. Although, fewer pundits and politicians actually believed this, it was fairly widespread belief among the far right in America. Lastly, rock and roll was controversial because it encouraged a mixing of the races in public places at live venues. Again it was the far right wing in America that attacked rock and roll on this basis, but racial mixing made "middle" America uncomfortable as well[210]. There is irony here too, since the racist right wing and the bebop jazz musicians made strange bedfellows in the attack on rock and roll.

The "public" concern over rock and roll became hysteria in the mid to late 1950s. At first the concern was with the "dirty" lyrics of rhythm and blues songs. In the 1940s, rhythm and blues was just as raunchy as it was in the '50s, but by the '50s R&B had crossed over to the "white" market. Working class white kids in the South were the first to get turned on by rhythm and blues since they had access to some of the first radio stations that specialized in an all black broadcasting format, but as long as rock and roll remained exclusive to working class "juvenile delinquents," it wasn't seen as a threat to the moral order. When rock and roll went prime time all across the country, mainstream America freaked out because now *middle* class white kids were getting turned on. *Variety* Magazine, taking the side of ASCAP, embarked in a campaign in the mid 1950s against so-called "leerics" in rock and roll music. According to the writers in *Variety*, the double entendres in rock and roll songs betrayed a vulgarity not to be tolerated in America, and the magazine called on radio stations to ban filthy records and for record labels to censor their controversial artists. Many radio stations did, in fact, ban rock and roll records, and record companies cleaned up the main acts on their rosters out of fear that they'd face declining sales for their wares.

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[210] See *Race, Rock and Elvis*, by Michael T. Bertrand (Illionois,2000).

The most controversial aspects, however, were the race and class mixing of kids at rock and roll concerts. The sight of white middle class kids mixing with black kids and "white trash" delinquents at rock and roll concerts sparked a backlash that was led by the extreme right wing and middle America. The extreme right focused on racial mixing. In Alabama, Asa Carter the leader of the North Alabama White Citizens Council (the public face of the KKK) organized a campaign to get rock and roll records out of all the jukeboxes in Alabama, and his rational for doing so was the prevention of racial mixing. According to Carter, rock and roll music and its dirty lyrics were "immoral," but the real issue for racists like Carter was that rock and roll was a "plot" by the NAACP to "bring the white man down to the level of the Negro." Carter also argued that rock and roll contributed to the "moral degradation of children and serves the cause of integration[211]." It would be a stretch to say rock and roll was an NAACP plot, since rhythm and blues had been controversial in the black leadership community for many years, but Carter was right to suggest that rock and roll did serve the interests of integration. It's just that the black bourgeoisie of the NAACP had nothing to do with rock and roll. It was working class black and white musicians who played rock and roll that contributed to the cause of integration, and many, like Chuck Berry and Elvis were aware that they were promoting racial integration. Carl Perkins, in an interview from the '90s, recalled a conversation that he had with Chuck Berry, where the two men agreed that their music as doing as much for the cause of racial equality and the end of Jim Crow as the politicians were doing during the 1950s[212].

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[211] "White Council versus Rock and Roll." *Newsweek.* 47:32 April 23, 1956.

While mainstream "white" America distanced itself from racists in the KKK; nonetheless, they shared Asa Carter's moral outrage at the sexual content of rock and roll lyrics and the so-called threat that rock and roll posed to the "wholesome" mainstream morality of white middle class America. Carter was willing to make public white America's unconscious fear of black sexuality, especially the fear of white women being seduced by black men. Middle class whites that were afraid to reveal their racism and "classism" in public, found a way to code their racism and class based elitism in the moral language of highbrow/lowbrow cultural sensibilities. Carter's call for a plan to ban rock and roll records found a sympathetic audience all across America, in both jukebox joints and at radio stations. Although Carter's campaign to ban rock and roll records was ultimately unsustainable for legal reasons, many jukebox joints and radio stations across America banned rock and roll records that were considered offensive.

Class mixing also created a stir in America. Ironically, while Asa Carter and the racist KKK argued that rock and roll was a conspiracy cracked by the NAACP, civil rights leaders also attacked rock and roll. None other than Martin Luther King Jr., the bane of the Ku Klux Klan, joined Asa Carter in the attack on rock and roll, although for very different reasons. "Rock and roll," argued MLK, "plunges men's minds into degrading immoral depths[213]." Many established black Americans in the music industry agreed with MLK. Nat D. Williams a black disc jockey betrayed his middle class disposition when he referred to rock and roll as "cacophonic trash… no one should mistake rock and roll for Negro music[214].” Ideological membership in the middle class united blacks and whites against rock and roll. A letter to the editor of the *Pittsburg Courier* written by an African American read, “As for Elvis and Little Richard, they are two filthy performers… I hate to see the Negro race associated with such musical junk and vulgarity[215].” Here, it’s interesting that a white boy like Elvis is helping drag down the so-called Negro race, the other side of the coin, but essentially the same argument made by Asa Carter’s racist organizations. It demonstrates the complexity of how race and class are inextricable in America as two socially constructed categories that experienced simultaneously in everyday life. So-called liberals who were hoping to improve race relations in America, accused rock and roll of damaging the cause of civil rights because of the working class roots of rock and roll that were somehow “vulgar.” In other words, liberal whites and bourgeois blacks argued that equal rights between blacks and whites involved disassociation from the working class. An anonymous disc jockey wrote an editorial where he said that “On my show… I feature only the records of talented performers like Nat Cole, Lena Horne and Count Basie. Fats Domino has done much to harm race relations[216].” Much in the same way that Charles Mingus worked to create interracial solidarity among union musicians, here the disc jockey seeks to create middle class solidarity among whites and blacks by creating class separation between filthy working class people and respectable middle class people. In other words, class discrimination is a goal to be achieved as much as the goal of ending racial discrimination. It’s like saying the working class deserves to be discriminated against, but not middle class blacks. How dare previous obscure dishwashers, truck drivers, sharecroppers and factory workers invade the sphere of middle class popular culture!! According to Amiri Baraka, "rhythm and blues was hated by the middle class Negro[217]." The same kind of middle class attack was launched against Hank Williams. Williams' songs about the drudgery of hard work, and his descriptions of the rowdy life of manual workers offended "respectable" white folk[218]. The black and white middle class attack on rock and roll went national in when *Time Magazine* ran a feature story that warned America about the serious threat posed by rock and roll. The article was titled "Combat the Menace," and the writers warned middle class America that they were under assault from greasy dishwashers broadcasting their vulgarity across the airwaves undermining basic moral principles of good citizens. The heathen beasts were crashing the gates of middle class Eden. In 1956 *America* magazine exclaimed, "Beware Elvis Presley!" In the *New York Daily News*, Ben Gross wrote a review of Elvis' television appearance on the Milton Bearle show arguing that, "Elvis, who rotates his pelvis, was appalling musically. Also he gave an exhibition that was suggestive and vulgar, tinged with the kind of animalism that should be confined to dives and bordellos[219]." It's hard to imagine, more than fifty years later, that rock and roll music could have been so controversial in mainstream American society, but it was. Everyone was on the bandwagon bashing rock and roll, which seemed to legitimate the musicians' union's criticisms that were discursively based on the "craft" musicianship.

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[212] Bertrand, *Race, Rock and Elvis*.

[213] Martin Luther King Jr.'s quote appears in Bertrand, p 101.

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[214] Ibid.
[215] *Pittsburgh Courier*, Feb. 2, 1957, p 22.
[216] Ibid., p 10.

The AFM entered the broader public attack on rock and roll when their members appeared before Congress during the Payola hearings in 1958 and again in 1963, during

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[217] Amiri Baraka, *Blues People*, (New York)
[218] Ibid
[219] Gross' quote appears in Linda Martin's and Kerry Segrave's book, *Anti-Rock: The Opposition to Rock and Roll* (New York Da Capo Press 1988) p 63.

Congressional hearings on the "cultural front" of the Cold War. Although the musicians' union did not send its officers to the payola hearings to take a specific position on behalf of the union itself, many of their members did attend, since there was much at stake for rank and file members in the AFM who had additional interests as song writers and publishers, interests that were represented by the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), which was the organization that pushed hard for Congress to hold the hearings in the first place. Also, the AFM was loyal to ASCAP because ASCAP had supported the AFM during the recording ban of 1942 and as far back as 1937, when the AFM first threatened to strike against radio and the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB). In 1937, as the AFM was preparing for their strike, ASCAP allowed the AFM to use its offices for meetings, since ASCAP also faced NAB as a potential hostile employer. During the tumultuous years of the late 1930s and early 1940s, ASCAP represented the interests of songwriters, while the AFM represented the interests of performers, and since both organizations had a history of rocky contract negotiations with NAB, they figured their chances for prevailing over the NAB would improve if they cooperated and shared their resources[220].

While the Congressional hearings in 1958 and 1963 were oriented toward different issues, the AFM, like ASCAP, used both hearings to position itself as a public leader in the shaping of taste in America, and as part of an attempt to legitimate the union's role in shaping taste, the AFM appealed to anti-Communist hysteria in America.

The "payola scandal" as it came to be known, reached its zenith in 1958 when Congress investigated the practice of payola as part of an amendment to the Communications Act of 1934. At issue was the practice of "payola," which was the term industry insiders used to describe the practice of bribing disc jockeys to play certain records. Payola has always been a part of the music industry, going back the days of song plugging by Tin Pan Alley writers in the late 1890's. Payola only became controversial when it was associated with rock and roll. Record label owners realized in the early years of radio that if they could get their record on the air it was almost guaranteed to stimulate an increase in demand for that record. Under the Communications Act of 1934, it is illegal for record companies to pay disc jockeys at radio stations for playing their [the label's] records. In the words of the act, "a license for a radio or television broadcasting station shall not be granted to, or held by, any person or corporation engaged directly or indirectly in the business of publishing or manufacturing or selling of musical recordings." Payola had been around for years, and it didn't raise any eyebrows until rock and roll exploded in the 1950s. Then the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) instigated the Congressional investigation into payola in an effort to make the case that rock and roll was *created* by payola. ASCAP figured that if Congress would crack down on payola, then rock and roll would disappear. The assumption by ASCAP and the major record labels was that independent labels had manufactured the demand for rock and roll by bribing disc jockeys to play their rock and roll records. If the independent record companies were prevented from bribing disc jockeys, so it was thought, then rock and roll would fall off of the charts. ASCAP was also hoping to destroy its competitor, the Broadcast Music Inc. (BMI), which represented the interests of rock and roll songwriters.

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[220] *International Musician*, October 1937 and *Variety*, July 28, 1937.

ASCAP was alarmed at the popularity of rock and roll because BMI was taking a big piece of the pie from radio broadcasters. ASCAP excluded authors and publishers of rhythm and blues and rock and roll tunes on principle: ASCAP, like the rest of the music industry considered rock and roll as low class garbage, so they took it upon themselves to keep it out of the public arena. According to copyright law, radio stations must pay the owners of the music they broadcast whether it's on record or live. Until the 1940s, ASCAP had a monopoly on copyrighted music, and if radio stations wanted to get any music on the air they had to pay a fee to ASCAP, and then the organization was responsible for distributing the fees among its members. ASCAP was confident that their monopoly on copyrighted songs would give them the power to stamp out rock and roll, since they refused to represent anybody who wrote and/or published a rock and roll or rhythm and blues tune. For instance, May Axton, who co-wrote "Heartbreak Hotel" for Elvis, was denied membership to ASCAP despite repeated requests by Axton to join the organization[221]. The National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), the group that represents the interests of radio station owners against ASCAP, formed BMI in the 1940s as a way to break ASCAP's monopoly on copyrighted music. BMI found its chance to do so when rhythm and blues records became popular, beginning in the late 1940s. Soon BMI had a library large enough to challenge the power of ASCAP. When rock and roll dominated the charts beginning in the mid 1950s, BMI was a serious threat to the hegemony of ASCAP. It's ironic that rock and roll musicians/songwriters had to rely on a company union to get representation. BMI was essentially a company union of songwriters established by NAB with the specific purpose of busting ASCAP, which is not, strictly speaking, a labor union, but nonetheless, ASCAP is a guild organization, and it is closer to being a legitimate labor union than BMI. ASCAP, like the AFM, essentially shot itself in the foot by excluding rock and roll songwriters from its purview. The adherence to an elitist aesthetic would prove costly indeed.

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[221] See Arnold Shaw, *The Rockin' '50s* (New York: Hawthorne books, 1974)

While the AFM did not take as strong a stand as ASCAP during the Payola hearings, many of the union's members had a stake in the outcome because they were also members of ASCAP. During the course of the Congressional hearings it became known that Paul Whiteman, for example, was a major player in both the musicians' union and ASCAP, which partially explains why he was an outspoken critic of rock and roll[222]. Some AFM members also had an interest in BMI, which is why the AFM did not take an official public stand before Congress during the hearings. Still, major rank and file star recording artists like Whiteman overpowered any AFM members who might have been aligned with BMI, because both the leadership of the AFM and famous rank and file members were anxious to help ASCAP kill rock and roll, and the way to kill rock and roll was to take the high road on taste and morality.

In March of 1958 Dr. Louis Pichierri, director of music for public schools of Providence, R.I. testified before Congress during the payola hearings. Pichierri said,

> I am gravely concerned over the questionable character of a significant portion of the music, which is being broadcast today via radio and television. It is evident that the airwaves are being exploited and tastes are being manipulated. Second-rate tunes, and there are too many of them, are being promoted at the expense of more imaginative music…Recently, the people of the United States were shaken out of their complacency by *Russia's successful launching of the first earth satellite*. The incident, which caused both indignation and fear, also provoked some serious soul searching. It brought about an increasing awareness of the importance of the Nation's intellectual resources and has already precipitated

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[222] *Hearings before the Subcommittee on Communications of the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce United States Senate, Eighty-Fifth Congress, Second Session*, *on S. 2834,* page 543.

> various movements ostensibly to upgrade the entire educational structure of the country. Does it not follow, then, that the entertainment world in sympathy with this projected 20th century revival of learning, has an obligation to society, namely, that of providing entertainment which is artistically inspired, uplifting and above reproach…This is a very serious problem for us, because we are competing with the radio, and it is very difficult for us to be trying to teach Mozart and Beethoven, on the one hand, and have the radio blasting away with some of the [objectionable] materials we have to put up with…When the broadcasting interests dominate the airwaves with music of questionable character, music which lacks substance or ideas, the *moral and cultural health of our youth is in jeopardy* [emphasis mine][223].

Here we see, without any coding, that "good" music, in the end, really isn't about technique, or harmonic structure, or any other criteria taken separately from social context. Music isn't "good" or "bad" *in itself.* In other words, as much as musicians appealed to formalism and as much as they pointed to the structure of rock tunes *in themselves*, the real issue with rock and roll wasn't about the music itself. Rather, what was at issue was moral health, and ultimately moral discipline. In the midst of the Cold War, moral outrage against rock and roll usually included a reference to communism, as Pichierri mentioned in his testimony before Congress in March of 1958. The most infamous testimony during the payola hearings came from Frank Sinatra who said that rock and roll was the music of "cretinous goons" ... [and] rock and roll was "the most brutal, ugly, desperate, vicious form of expression it has been my misfortune to hear[224]."

While there were some major fall-outs and shakedowns in the music industry as a result of the payola hearings, rock and roll survived. If there was any doubt about the survival of rock and roll after 1958, the arrival of the Beatles in 1964 slammed the door shut on what remained of anti-rock and roll conspirators. If there was any hope that rock and roll might go down in flames, it would have accompanied the destruction of Alan Freed. Freed, who copyrighted the phrase "rock and roll," was a main target of the payola hearings, because he, perhaps more than any other disc jockey in America, was responsible for bringing rhythm and blues music to a white teenage audience. Freed established himself as a major player with his successful radio show in New York City, and ASCAP figured if they could bust him on payola, it would be a great victory in the campaign against rock and roll. Freed was busted and he was subsequently forced to quit his gig at WABC in New York, which led ASCAP president Paul Cunningham to claim that, "we can expect a revival of good music in the style of the Gershwins, the Kerns, and the Rombergs[225]." ASCAP was able to bring down Freed, but not rock and roll.

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[223] *Hearings before the Subcommittee on Communications of the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce United States Senate, Eighty-Fifth Congress, Second Session*, *on S. 2834,* page 105-106.
[224] Ibid.

Five years later, Herman Kenin, President of the AFM, testified before the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee about the role of culture in the Cold War with the Soviet Union. The House subcommittee on Foreign Affairs was in charge of a $2.5 million dollar budget for sending American musicians abroad for public performances to foreign audiences. The money was earmarked for the "cultural program," which was a subcommittee of the committee on Foreign Affairs. At issue was an increase in funding for the cultural program as part of an effort to stem the tide of communism around the world. For Kenin it was crucial that only the "best" American musicians be involved in the program set up by the House committee. According to Kenin,

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[225] *Variety*, 204:54 October 17, 1956.

> Any relaxation from the policy of 'only the best' will eventually cause harm…In stressing the value of the contributions made to the cultural program by the professional practitioner it is not my intention to belittle or denigrate the non-professional or amateur groups who also participate. It is my earnest conviction, however, that the professional, by the very nature of his experience and total immersion in his art, operates within a framework peculiarly suited to the needs of the program[226].

During the same hearings, AFM member Rosario Mazzeo, the director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, asked Congress,

> What are we doing today to see that foreign nations hear this supreme expression of our music? We are doing little, currently, almost nothing, even though these orchestras are acknowledged by experts to be the very finest in the world. We are a great nation; we believe the best… I have been continually disturbed with the trend in the last years, watching the new stream of musical ambassadors we are sending forth…it seems incomprehensible to me that we have been sending abroad the various musical forces almost to the exclusion of our great orchestras[227].

Although Mazzeo did not name rock and roll specifically, it was clear that what he meant by "disturbed," was that the American music industry – the private sector - was exporting rock and roll around the world rather than America's best orchestras. Mazzeo was asking Congress to intervene and save America's orchestras as a way to defeat communism. While the testimony by Pichierri and Kenin was separated by five years, a common appeal Cold War patriotism connects the two. Both testimonies argue that a decline in artistic integrity in the field of music was detrimental to the effort to defeat communism. If the U.S. were to succeed in its struggle against the communists, then it was imperative that the U.S. government fund the arts as a means to improve American music. The payola hearings were not specifically about the threat of communism, but there were those who believed the fight against rock and roll was part of the fight against communism. Right wing groups like the John Birch Society claimed, for example, that rock and roll was conceived as a communist plot to take over the minds of American teenagers. They argued that rock and roll seduced American teenagers with a relentless back beat that literally possessed their bodies and forced them into a frenzy of irresistible and uncontrollable dancing. Once teenagers were in a trance like state induced by the music, their minds could be taken over by communist propaganda and ideology[228].

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[226] "Only the Best is Good Enough' A.F. of M. Tells Congress Cultural Committee," the *International Musician,* (October, 1963).
[227] *Ibid.,*

Specifically, the payola hearings was part of an attempt by the major record labels and ASCAP to squash rock and roll, while the Congressional hearings on funding for cultural programs were convened partly as a plea to rescue “good” music, since rock and roll survived the payola scandal. Since the music establishment in America, which included the AFM, could not kill rock and roll in the late 1950s, the strategy changed to one of asking Congress to fund a cultural revival of “good” music. The AFM could afford to debase rock and roll if it were true that rock and roll were just a fad, as they wrongly predicted in the 1950s, although it did seem like for a few years that the backlash against rock and roll might succeed. For a few years between 1958 and 1963, it may have seemed like rock and roll was on the wane, but that scenario was not to be, because four band mates from the U.K. were about to blow up the entire music industry in spite of the best efforts of the musicians’ union to stop them. It is to that story that we now turn.

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[228] See *Variety*, 244:2, 54. September 7, 1966.

CHAPTER FIVE:

A WORKING CLASS HERO IS SOMETHING TO BE:
THE MUSICIANS' UNION BANS THE BEATLES AND THE KINKS

"The way things are going, they're going to crucify me... A working class hero is something to be."

-- John Lennon

On April 4, 1964 Bonnie Wilkins, a teen-age rock and roll enthusiast from Scottsdale, Arizona wrote a letter to Herman Kenin, then President of the American Federation of Musicians. Attached to the letter was a petition containing thousands of signatures from other teenagers in the Scottsdale area. On behalf of her peers she wrote:

> Dear Mr. Kenin,
> We have discovered that you are trying to keep those fabulous, wonderful, tremendous Beatles out of the United States. We have never heard of anything so shocking in all our lives. We don't know much about this cultural exchange bit, but since you don't think they are culture, why don't you go mess up the affairs of someone else. You really have a lot of nerve, trying to keep them out of the United States, but if you can brainwash the authorities into doing it, you can just say good-bye to us teenagers – we're all moving to England. And to think that all this time we thought that America was a free country…sometimes we wonder.
> Sincerely,
> Bonnie Wilkins[229].

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[229] *National Archives and Records Administration*, Record Group 174, Stack Area 530, Row 47, Shelf 7, Box 164 "Beatles."

The phenomenon called “Beatlemania” had, by the time Ms. Wilkins wrote her letter to the musicians’ union, already swept across the United States following the extraordinarily popular and financially successful debut tour of the Beatles in January and February of 1964. Shortly after that tour, a rumor began to spread that the American musicians’ union was going to ban the Beatles from future tours of the U.S., prompting Beatles’ fans like Bonnie Wilkins to write letters to President Kenin and the American Federation of Musicians in protest of any such ban. The “cultural exchange bit” that Ms. Wilkins refers to in her letter was an arrangement crafted between the American Federation of Musicians and the British Musicians’ Union (BMU) in March of ‘64, which was designed to regulate the movement of professional musicians between the two countries. In that arrangement, both unions agreed to allow the free “exchange” of musicians who were considered “uniquely talented” or who were thought to posses, and be of, “culture.” Any musician deemed to be highly valuable to the “culture” of society was allowed to move about freely between the U.S. and the U.K. On the other hand, rock and roll musicians, all of whom were deemed “culturally *non*-valuable” by the two unions, were restricted by the unions to very limited touring and commercial performances outside of their home country. According to the language of the agreement, rock and roll bands were labeled “uncultured,” or lacking “culture,” because the prevailing belief in both unions was that anyone could play rock and roll music since it didn’t require any special talent. Whereas, according the leadership of the unions, there were but a handful of truly exceptional musicians – most of whom, “co-incidentally,” played in the classical idiom. It was thought by the unions that performances of these “unique” musicians advanced the accumulation and progression of “culture,” and it would be a crime to restrict their performances, since they had so much to offer the masses[230]. Unexceptional rock and roll musicians like the Beatles, however, were thought to be in relatively high supply in both countries. So, according to the agreement, if a rock and roll band like the Beatles were to come and play in the States, then England would have to accept a rock band from the U.S., as a fair exchange or one for one trade: one job for one job. The agreement was supposedly about protecting jobs in both locations and not over-supplying the labor market with *un*exceptional musicians. While Kenin was working out the deal with the BMU, he was also lobbying the U.S. Secretary of Labor, Willard Wirtz, to place an embargo of sorts on rock and roll musicians coming from the U.K. Kenin was hoping that Wirtz would support the arrangement between the AFM and the BMU and mobilize the Dept. of Labor's resources to help enforce the rules of the musicians' unions arrangement by closing the borders to rock and roll bands. President Kenin insisted that any of the available musicians in America could perform the same stuff that the Beatles played, and that therefore the Beatles need not visit the States, since they might take jobs away from "mediocre" American musicians. Since rock and roll could supposedly be played by anyone with little difference from one performance to the next, he didn't think the Beatles would be missed; little did he know. Kenin also figured that nobody would disagree with the union's use of the term "culture," and the labeling of rock and roll as a music that lacked "culture." On the contrary, unbeknownst to Kenin, the culture wars that were supposed to have ended with the Payola scandal were about to flare up again.

Young rock and roll fans all over the U.S. like Bonnie Wilkins were very upset by the news of the agreement between the two musicians' unions, because it meant that the

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[230] I have tried to find a list of these so-called "unique" musicians, but I haven't been able to find any specific list or definition of exactly who these musicians were. It seems the unions had an unspoken agreement on who would count as a "cultured" musician.

Beatles could be blocked from returning to America for their pre-scheduled August tour later that year. Many Beatles fans had already purchased tickets for the planned second tour of the Fab Four, and they were quite upset to learn that they might miss their chance to see the British rock and roll phenomenon. In fact, Kenin received many more such letters from concerned rock and roll fans eager to consume more of the music from the invading British rock band. A few days later on April 7, Kenin received a rather feisty letter from three teenagers from Dayton, Ohio named Cynthia Westendorf, Linda Hausfeld and Carol Herbert. That letter reads:

> Dear Mr. Kenin,
> In reference to a recent article in the *Dayton Daily News*, in which you state that the Beatles are not culture, we would like to know what you mean. In the opinion of many Dayton teenagers we get the idea that you are trying to culturize [sic] American teenagers. However, we would like to inform you that American teenagers have been keen on the idea of Pop music for the last thirty years and we don't think that you are going to change them. In the article it indicated that you intend to keep the Beatles out of America, unless there is a reciprocal exchange for the performance of American musicians in Britain…In our opinion, we feel that if U.S. musicians, which you claim to be unemployed, were any good, they would not need the government to help them…In addition, we do not think adults have a right to stop the younger generation from enjoying what it loves and wants: the BEATLES!!!! Please give us a chance to enjoy something we love! Please don't ask us to Hold Your Hand in this action…Sir, you have a big fight ahead of you: for we who have stood amongst the screamers, the twisters and the jumpers know what a fight it will be. Hell hath no fury like a Beatle-nik spurned!
> Respectfully,
> Cindy Westendorf and Linda Hausfeld and Carol Herbert
> Beatle fans, and – PROUD OF IT!!!!!!

> P.S. We think the BEATLES are fabmost, really gear, and not swelling about the bounce like some groups. If you would like to acquire the meaning of this last sentence, go buy yourself a BEATLE book!!!!!![231]

By April 1964, a panic had spread among teenage *and* adult Beatle-niks throughout the country who were terrified of the idea that the Beatles would never again return to the United States after their triumphant debut tour of January-February 1964. Letters poured into President Kenins' office pleading with him not to ban the Fab Four. Some of the letters from Beatles fans, like the one from the Dayton teenagers above, took a confrontational stance, threatening to fight the musicians' union by various means, including, demonstrations, civil disobedience and lobbying Congress on their behalf if the ban were not lifted and the arrangement between the unions revised. Beatle-niks were also writing to the U.S. Secretary of Labor, Willard Wirtz, pleading with him not to allow the musicians' union to prevent the Beatles from returning later that year. Virtually all of the letters to Wirtz condemned the AFM policy and referred to President Kenin by name as the object of their anger and frustration. In some of the letters to Wirtz, young rock and roll fans referred to the musicians' union and President Kenin collectively as "those stupid musicians" or those "jealous" musicians[232]. Other letters were even more caustic, referring to Kenin and the musicians' union as "communists," suggesting that labor unions like the AFM were akin to corrupt, power hungry Communist Party bureaucrats, because the union was lobbying for restrictions on both the freedom of movement among individuals and the freedom of consumers to choose what kind of music to consume. Bonnie Wilkins, the teen who wrote the letter above, commented sarcastically that she was surprised to find out that the U.S. isn't really a "free" country. Letters condemning the musicians' union came from every corner of the country. Patsy Johnson of Mississippi wrote, "I read an article in our paper that Herman Kenin, the President of the American Federation of Musicians is complaining to you abut the 'surprise' invasion of the Beatles…Mr. Kenin is going to do all he can to keep the Beatles out of America, while we are going to do all we can to get them back." Janet Mitchell from San Diego, Ca. wrote,

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[231] *Ibid*.,
[232] *Ibid*

> Dear Mr. Wirtz,
> In the April 4 *San Diego Tribune* was an article stating that the Department of Labor 'must approve the entry of aliens seeking work in the U.S.' The paper also said 'such admission is refused if qualified Americans are available for the work sought by such foreigners.' According to the newspaper this immigration clearance was issued because Mr. Kenin, president of the American Federation of Musicians, protested the February visit of the Beatles…Please sir, what is the exact story on this? How will you determine whether there are qualified Americans when the Beatles request readmission? If you ask me or any other teen-age girl (and there's a lot of us) there is no one who even comes near to their [the Beatles] talent, and we mean it! Could you please tell us how this is going to affect the August visit of the Beatles? We're looking forward to it, so please don't disappoint us. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter,
> Sincerely yours,
> Janet Mitchell[233]

Nearly all of the letters from angry Beatle-niks took the musicians' union to task over the issues of "culture" and freedom of speech and freedom of movement. Beatles fans rejected the union's notion that rock and roll music lacked "culture," and many astute teens raised the issue on a philosophical level by questioning the very meaning of the word "culture." Beatles fans also jumped on the union for restricting the freedom of expression and the freedom of movement, pointing out the irony of the ban on the Beatles: namely, the U.S. was supposed to be the "good guys" in the Cold War, on the side that valued freedom of expression against the tyranny and repression of Communism. Interestingly, red-baiting was used on both sides of the rock and roll controversy, as hard-core right wing elements like the John Birch Society, were convinced that the Beatles were themselves part of a Communist plot to brainwash young people in the United States and the rest of the "free" world.

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[233] *Ibid*

As a result of the brewing controversy over the Beatles, Kenin and the musicians' union had become villains in the public imagination, fulfilling in many ways the stereotype of the corrupt and selfish union boss, a stereotype that had become a central trope in American culture by the 1960s after decades of ideological attacks on labor unions by conservative social critics and politicians. It was also ironic Beatles fans were accusing the musicians' union of acting like communists, because just a year earlier, the AFM had testified before Congress on the importance of the cultural dimension in the Cold War with the Soviet Union, claiming that the musician's union could contribute to the American effort to defeat communism by exporting the 'best' music in the world and by fighting against the dogmatic ideological definitions of "good" music by the Communists. One of the main points made by the AFM in those hearings was that it was crucial to fight against the Communist party's supposed campaign to eliminate modern "bourgeois" music in favor of a so-called proletarian aesthetic, because, according to the AFM, democracy and freedom in society depend partly upon the freedom of expression in the arts[234]. In the minds of Beatle-niks, how could the AFM testify before Congress on the importance of "freedom" of expression in the practice of music, while simultaneously seeking to restrict the performances of certain musicians and degrade the value of certain kinds of music in the name of "culture?" Wasn't that what the Communists were doing?

While conservative forces had led much of the attacks on labor unions since the war, the conservatives did not monopolize the criticism of labor unions. On the contrary, the emergent New Left, as well as the related youth and counter cultures took a critical stance against labor unions as well, beginning in the mid-1960s. Young people in general, including the student New Left, and the emerging counter culture in particular, came to see labor unions as part of the "establishment," part of what was wrong with America[235]. The controversy over the Beatles and the musicians' union has to be seen within this larger context of ideological conflict between the established bureaucracies of the labor movement on the one hand, and the 1960s youth/counter culture on the other. Kenin and the musicians' union were framed by the pro-Beatles youth culture as "squares," part of the conservative older generation that didn't understand the cultural changes taking place in America. Another important aspect of the social environment of the 1960s that contributed to the framing of the Beatles controversy with the musicians' union was that by 1964, young Beatles fans felt empowered by the climate of social unrest that was produced by the Civil Rights Movement on the one hand, and on the other hand, by increased student activism, including the Free Speech Movement that caught fire on the campus of UC Berkeley in 1964. Dissent and civil disobedience was in the air, and it influenced the way in which young rock and roll fans responded to the Beatles crisis. Pamela Moe, a teenager from Springfield, Massachusetts, predicted "boycotts, riots, and Beatles-Rights marches" if the AFM went through with the ban on the Beatles[236]. Priscilla H. Aspinwall from Skaneateles, New York vowed, "WE WILL PROTEST!"

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[234] "'Only the Best is Good Enough' A.F. of M. Tells Congress Cultural Committee," *International Musician*, October, 1963, p 7. See also my discussion of the AFM's testimony before Congress in the previous chapter.

[235] See *The New Left and Labor in the 1960s,* by Peter B. Levy (Urbana University of Illinois Press 1994).

Other letters by concerned Beatles fans went straight to the top of the chain of command, to the President of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson, and again they called out the musicians' union as the bad guys, and they asked President Johnson to intervene and over-rule Kenin and the musicians' union on the matter concerning the Fab Four "mop tops" from the U.K. Debbie Carey of Philadelphia wrote:

> URGENT!!
> Dear Mr. President,
> In a newspaper recently there was an article saying that if the Beatles come in August the Musicians' Union won't allow them to bring their instruments. It also stated that they needed government approval. Will you please give that approval? I know your daughters like them, although you may not, please do it for the teen-agers of America! … Please tell the Union to disregard that statement! About 50 million teens will love you for it. Mr. Johnson you can't allow them [the musicians' union] to keep them [the Beatles] or their instruments out of America, please, please do something…
> Love,
> Debbie Carey
> P.S. Do you like them? (answer quick)

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[236] *National Archives and Records Administration*, Record Group 174, Stack Area 530, Row 47, Shelf 7, Box 164 "Beatles."

Ms. Carey's letter reveals that teenagers coming of age in the 1960s were aware of their power as a collective force in American politics: the prospect of "50 million teens" self conscious of themselves as a distinct generation with a distinct culture would make even the most seasoned politician take notice. While teenagers were responsible for most of the letters of protest against news of the impending ban on the Beatles, it wasn't exclusively teenagers who were writing to Kenin and Wirtz. "Adults" were getting in on the action as well. A parent from Dayton wrote:

> I am not a teenage girl, but a responsible housewife and mother of three preschool children. The anti-Beatle fanatics cannot be half as bored with the Beatles as I am with their prejudiced views on what constitutes good music and what is fit, in their opinion, for teenagers to swoon over…No wonder teenagers rebel when parents and teachers are constantly criticizing their clothes, hairdos and rock and roll idols. Naturally, after awhile they're bound to believe anything they do is wrong…
> Mrs. Terry M. Lackey[237].

Most of the letters coming into the offices of Kenin and Wirtz were from Beatles fans who were against the ban, but there were also some people on the other side of the issue, people who were glad to hear the news of the impending ban on the Beatles, and they wrote to Kenin supporting his position on the Beatles and foreign "entertainers" in general. In these letters, the issue was presented as a labor market problem, the idea being that foreign workers took jobs away from American citizens. A few letters in support of a plan to keep the Beatles out of the states reached the desk of Secretary Wirtz as well. Barbara Lea, of Manhattan wrote the following, "I have read that a new rule placing an embargo of sorts on foreign talent has just taken effect. This is good news to professional entertainers who are often out of work in their own country." Wirtz responded to Ms. Lea that, "we are hopeful that the arrangements which we have made with the Immigration and Naturalization Service will result in improved employment opportunities for talented entertainers in this country[238]." Simone Tucker, also from Manhattan wrote, "If it is true that one of the major problems in the United States is unemployment why can non-American citizens come over here to seek and find employment? … If you give a job, any job to a non-American, this means that an American similarly qualified is precluded from obtaining that job… I believe that if you are a citizen of this country you are entitled to seek and secure employment in this country without having to compete with foreign imported help." In 1964, unemployment was a central issue in American politics, and Miss Tucker's letter struck a nerve in Secretary Wirtz, who responded back,

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[237] *Ibid*

> Dear Miss Tucker,
> This is in response to your letter of April 21, 1964, in which you request information concerning importation of aliens for entertainment positions…We have assumed recently the task of reviewing visa applications for entertainers seeking temporary employment within the United States. As our participation in these occupations increases, we anticipate that the increased protection will accrue to citizen entertainers seeking employment. These actions are taken under responsibilities assigned to the Secretary of Labor by the Attorney General pursuant to authorization contained in the Immigration and Naturalization Act.
> We appreciate your interest in the welfare of the citizen labor force and in programs, which are of major concern to us.
> Yours sincerely,
> W. Willard Wirtz
> Secretary of Labor

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[238] *Ibid*

The controversy over the Beatles was complicated because it involved two seemingly separate issues, one having to do with the meaning of "culture," the other having to do with the labor market. Supporters of the Beatles were addressing the issue of culture and particularly the labeling of the Beatles and rock and roll generally, as musicians who lacked talent and music that lacked "culture." Those who argued in favor of banning the Beatles interpreted the issue as a problem of competition for scarce jobs, and that U.S. citizens should get first dibs on jobs in America. Interestingly, though, is that those who framed the issue as primarily a labor market problem still included the issue of culture as an important subtext. Sure, the main issue may have been jobs, but in the eyes of the supporters of the Beatles ban, it was a good idea to keep pesky British rock and roll bands out of the U.S., period. In 1964, cultural conservatives still viewed rock and roll music as a menace and its fans as no-good hooligans. In short, the Beatles were a double threat: job stealers *and* delinquents. For cultural conservatives like Herman Kenin, the voice of the musicians' union, rock and roll delinquents need not apply for entry into the U.S. Regardless of the prevailing conditions in the labor market for musicians, rock and roll was not welcome by the musicians' union, period. In this way, culture matters as much or more than perceived economic conditions. To understand the full complexity of the issue requires going back to the origin of the Beatles controversy, which began a year earlier as a problem involving foreign actors from the U.K. working in the states.

The origin of the Beatles controversy goes back to April of 1963, when the president of the actors union (the Actor's Equity Association) in the U.S., Angus Duncan, had written to Secretary Wirtz to complain about the increasing number of British actors coming to the U.S. in search of work. According to Duncan, too many British actors had found work in the States, displacing American actors and exacerbating the problem of unemployment among American born actors. Duncan requested that Wirtz and the Department of Labor help the Immigration and Naturalization Service enforce a particular subsection of the Immigration and Naturalization Act that was designed to govern the amount of foreign workers coming to the U.S. In Section 101(a) (15) H of the Act, foreign workers seeking work in the U.S. are supposed to be separated by the INS into two categories: “H (i)” and “H (ii).” The difference between the two categories turns on the question of merit and talent. Workers of “distinguished merit and ability” fall under the category H (i), whereas workers who “have no unique talents” fall under the category H (ii). The purpose behind the designation of separate categories of foreign workers seeking temporary employment in the U.S. is to protect the jobs of U.S. citizens. “Aliens” who seek work under category H (ii) face many more restrictions than those entering the states under H (i). The logic being that only under conditions of severe labor shortage will the U.S. allow the free flow of H (ii) workers in and out of the U.S. Until 1964, it had been the job of the INS to make the determinations about the status of foreign performers seeking temporary employment in the U.S., and they decided whether or not an entertainer possessed “distinguished merit” and “unique talents.” Foreign entertainers who qualified as H (i) aliens were allowed entry into, and freedom to move about the U.S. Those who didn’t qualify would either be refused entry or allowed very limited commercial engagements. According to Actor’s Equity, however, both the INS and the Department of Labor had been too inconsistent and haphazard in their enforcement of the law. The main issue for Duncan and the actors’ union was that too many entertainers were coming into the United States under category H (ii), “no unique talents.” In short, the INS was not enforcing the rules. According to Duncan,

> the British actor is not required to receive certification from the United States Employment Service regarding the unavailability of like persons in the United States…British immigration authorities have discouraged American actors from working in England…Actor’s Equity has no objection to the appearance on the American stage of truly distinguished performers, such as Laurence Olivier, John Gielgud, or Ralph Richardson. The presence of such people and others of similar stature enhance the American theatre and enriches the cultural fare available to American audiences. Equity strongly objects, however, to the importation of people under section 101 (a) (15) (H) who possess far less talent and fame. Equity also objects to the importation of undistinguished alien performers when American actors and actresses – fully capable of performing with competence – are unemployed and seeking work.
>
> I call your attention to this problem in the hope that the Department of Labor will exercise the authority given it by the Congress to correct what has become a matter of great concern to the working men and women of the American theatre.
>
> I shall be happy to discuss this matter further with you at your convenience. Meanwhile, I look forward to your reply.
>
> Sincerely Yours,
> Angus Duncan.
> Actor’s Equity Association[239]

Thus, in 1963 the stage was set. Angus Duncan and the actors’ union had set the precedent for President Kenin and the AFM, giving Kenin a firm ground from which to lobby the government for a ban on the Beatles the following year. The Beatles were, according to Kenin, a variation of the same problem faced by the actors' union: British entertainers entering the U.S. illegally as H (ii) workers. Almost a year after Duncan's first appeal, Wirtz finally wrote back to the actors' union, saying that he agreed with Duncan's assessment of the problem, and furthermore that the Department of Labor would indeed take a more active role in restricting the number of "non-talented," or "H (ii)"foreign performers and entertainers seeking temporary employment in the United States. The timing of Wirtz's statement was perfect for Kenin, because the change in the Department of Labor's policy, which was announced by Wirtz in March, came right on the heals of the Beatles inaugural tour in February of '64. Since the Beatles were allowed entry into the states under category H (ii), Kenin was confident that the INS and the Dept. of Labor would keep them out the next time they applied for work in the states.

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[239] *Ibid*

The Beatles first tour in 1964 and the explosion of Beatlemania soon thereafter had taken the "adult" world by surprise, but it particularly disturbed Kenin and the musicians' union. In addition to the chaos created by thousands of screaming fans that greeted the Beatles at each concert - which in the minds of the union leadership seemed like a throw-back to the chaos and riots that accompanied rock and roll concerts in the 1950s - the Fab Four also turned the entire record industry around almost single handedly. Here was a group of mop top British lads seizing control of the American music industry.

Prior to the arrival of the Beatles, between the years 1957-1961, records sales in the U.S. where down 5% (down to about $600 million), thanks in part to the Payola scandal and the backlash against rock and roll music at the end of the 1950s[240]. By 1963, there was a slight turn around in the industry: sales went up by about 1%. But beginning in 1964 with the arrival of the Beatles, record sales in the industry grew by double digits every year, eventually reaching $1.6 billion in sales by 1969. In the year 1964 alone, the Fab Four charted 28 singles, and commanded the top five slots in the first week of April. Also that month, they accounted for a whopping 60% of all singles sold worldwide. In addition to their singles, the Beatles also released 6 best-selling albums in 1964. All told, between the years 1963 to 1968, the Beatles sold more than $154 million worth of records worldwide[241]. The Beatles enormous success following their debut tour inspired other British rock bands to try their luck in the states. Soon, there was a hoard of "red coat" rock bands landing on the shores of America including, Dave Clark Five, Herman's Hermits, the Rolling Stones, the Who, the Zombies, Them, the Searchers, Gerry and the Pacemakers, and the Kinks. Taken collectively, the phenomenon was referred to as the "British invasion" of rock bands.

It seemed to the American Federation of Musicians as if British rock bands were getting too big a piece of the financial pie. The economic spoils of the American music industry were going to foreign-born musicians. More importantly, the British invasion sealed the fate of the music industry: rock and roll was number one again, and this time it was here to stay, for good. The cultural threat of the Beatles was perhaps more serious than the perceived economic threat. The very same music that was suppressed by the cultural backlash that fueled the Payola hearings before Congress - namely, the

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[240] See the previous chapter for a discussion of the Payola scandal and its effect on the sale rock and roll records.

[241] Steve Chapple and Reebee Garofalo, *Rock'n'Roll Is Here to Pay: The History and Politics of the Music Industry* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1977), 70.

"threatening" music of Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis and Elvis - was brought back to American by the Beatles, and this time there was no stopping the desires of young consumers of rock and roll.

While the news of the British Invasion of rock bands and the extraordinary success of the Beatles in America did not go over well with the AFM, Kenin was still convinced – in spite of Beatlemania - that he could help suppress the second wave of rock and roll, because when he heard that the actors' union had success appealing to Department of Labor and the INS to restrict the flow of British actors to the U.S., he realized he had a chance to do something about the Beatles "problem" and the "threat" of the ongoing British invasion. As a way to secure the musicians' union's role and stake in the new labor policy under Secretary Wirtz, Kenin himself sent a letter to the Department of Labor in March, to reiterate some of the same issues that were raised by Angus Duncan and the actors' union a year before, and to underline the AFM's specific concerns in the matter of the so-called British invasion. Kenin was hoping to get a guarantee from Secretary Wirtz that the musicians' union would get the same deal as was given to the actors' union, as well as a commitment from the Department of Labor to continue funding the program that screened foreign entertainers. Thus, just a few weeks after the Beatles left the U.S., Kenin sent the following letter to Secretary Wirtz:

> Dear Mr. Secretary:
> If it be true, as I am informed, that the Department hopes shortly to extend its permit scrutiny of imported labor to include actors and other performing artists, we ask most urgently that its expertise extend to musicians coming to the United States to fill commercial engagements.

> As you know, the American Federation of Musicians has not attempted restraints against those instrumental artists or combinations that qualify clearly as cultural exchanges. The other category – instrumentalists fulfilling stage, ballroom and TV engagements for strictly mass audience commercial entrepreneurs – is cutting deeply into the employment opportunities for American musicians who, unhappily, constitute one of the most consistently unemployed groups in the entire labor spectrum. The influx form England recently…has grown out of all reasonable proportion. In too many instances we have not been able to obtain the protections we deserve and demand from the Immigration Service.
>
> I most sincerely hope that the Department of Labor will indeed extend its expertise into the field of musicians. It this be the intention, please advise me what our procedures should be in communicating our recommendations to the Department for its determination.
>
> Thanking you for your attention to this rather pressing matter, I am,
> Sincerely,
> Herman Kenin, President
> American Federation of Musicians, AFL[242]

Kenin argued to Wirtz that because the Beatles and other rock bands entered the United States under category H (ii), a.k.a. "not unique" aliens seeking temporary employment, they were essentially "illegal" aliens. Wirtz agreed, and the Department of Labor set up regional offices in New York, Los Angeles, Nashville and a few other locations to deal specifically with the issue of foreign musicians seeking temporary work in the United States. It was the task of the staff in these offices to determine whether or not musicians coming to perform in the states were "uniquely talented." Not surprisingly, in most cases, the office staff in each location consulted the local branch of the musicians' union to help determine whether or not foreign musicians had special talent[243]. Once the bureaucratic apparatus was set up by Department of Labor and the musicians' union, Kenin was confident that the Beatles and the rest of the British invasion rock bands would not be able to enter again.

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[242] *National Archives and Records Administration*, Record Group 174, Stack Area 530, Row 47, Shelf 7, Box 164 "Beatles."

While the actor's union was continuing its lobbying efforts with Secretary Wirtz, Kenin had been working on a separate deal with the British Musicians' Union (BMU) to limit the movement of rock and roll musicians between the U.S. and the U.K., which was the same deal mentioned in the letter by Bonnie Wilkins. And so, in March of '64 it seemed that everything fell into place for Kenin and the musicians' union: on the one hand, he was able to broker a deal with the BMU to stem the flow of British rock bands coming into the U.S., and on the other hand, the U.S. Department of Labor agreed to work with the INS and the AFM to restrict the flow of "non-talented" foreign entertainers coming to the states. It seemed like Kenin had succeeded in thwarting the British Invasion, but his letter lit a firestorm of controversy, especially around the issue of "culture." Kenin's problems were just beginning.

Outlined in Kenin's letter to Wirtz is a clear attempt to draw a distinction between a highbrow and lowbrow aesthetic, what he refers to as the difference between an "exchange of culture" and "mass entertainment." The problem of the "mass" is imbedded in a context signifying issues having mainly to do with the labor market, but still "mass" art (entertainment) is posed as a *cultural* problem. Mass art, or popular culture, was a problem for Kenin both because it lacks value and because there was *too much* of it. Perhaps such a distinction between high art and popular art was common sense to certain factions within the musicians' union, and thus not controversial, but the AFM would soon find itself a main target in the resurgence of culture wars in the sixties precisely because of its conservative, elitist point of view on rock and roll. Kenin eventually did receive the same deal from Wirtz and the Department of Labor, but the Beatles issue did not go away, nor was Kenin able to stop the British invasion of rock bands. On the contrary, things were about to change drastically, but not in the direction that Kenin had hoped. Wirtz promised to protect the jobs of American musicians, but nonetheless the relentless British invasion of rock and roll would continue to wage the rock and roll revolution in both American culture and the music industry.

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[243] *National Archives and Records Administration* Record Group 174, Stack Area 530, Row 47, Compartment 48, Shelf 7, Box 165 "Employment Security."

The panic in America over the status of the Beatles first gathered steam in March when *Variety* published an article claiming that the AFM was "irate" about the Beatles American tour. The headline read, "Irate AFM Flips Lid Over Invasion of 'Rocking Redcoats' *Sans* Culture[244]." The article had an alarming tone and portrayed the Beatles as a renewed threat posed by rock and roll against the American music industry. *Variety* had waged an earlier campaign against rock and roll in the fifties, because of the alleged "dirty lyrics" of rock and roll, and with the Beatles, the trade magazine once again was eager to attack rock and roll. According to the article, "there's a strong possibility that the AFM will make some moves with the U.S. State Department and the British MU to block unrestricted entry of the British rockers whose cultural stature is viewed very dubiously." It wasn't just the union that viewed the cultural stature of rock and roll "dubiously." On the contrary, the *Variety* staff shared that point of view. The staff writers at *Variety* were ready to start churning out articles on the moral depravity of rock and roll again when the Beatles landed on our shores, as part of an effort to help the AFM repel the invading hoard of "lowbrows." The *Variety* article, as alarming as it sounded, didn't cause too much of a stir, since it appealed to a fairly small audience of readers, but by April things changed dramatically. On April 2, 1964, the same week that the Beatles held the top five slots on the *Billboard* charts, the U.S. Department of Labor issued a press release that described changes in the department's policy on foreign entertainers. After the successful lobbying efforts of the actors' and musicians' unions, the Department of Labor went public with its changes, to ensure American workers that it had their best interests at heart. The press release read as follows: "Effective April 15, entertainers for whom entrance visas are requested under Section 101 (a) (15) H (ii) of the Immigration and Nationality Act will no longer be exempt from clearance certification. Performers who come within this category are aliens who have *no unique talents*[245](emphasis mine)." The Department of Labor's press release may not have made such a splash were it not for an article written by Victor Riesel, a syndicated columnist, who covered the press conference. His article, titled "Keeping Out the Beatles," was reproduced in newspapers all across the country, and it was this article that teen-agers like Bonnie Wilkins and others had read and responded to in the thousands. Riesel's piece reads like a tabloid article, with the opening lines reading, "'tis the final conflict. Let each stand in his place. At my side is a man of awesome courage…this fellow is Herman Kenin, president of the American Federation of Musicians…Kenin just doesn't believe the Beatles are culture. He is not much impressed by 'Yeah, Yeah, Yeah…I Wanna Hold Your Hand[246].'" Riesel's sensationalistic coverage of the press conference sent shock waves across teen-age America. He reported that the AFM had brow beaten the Department of Labor into agreeing to ban all British rock groups, including the Beatles, making it seem like the musicians' union had more power than was actually the case. Perhaps Riesel himself took some pleasure in the thought of a ban on the Beatles. Regardless, Riesel had Beatles fans terrified that the Fab Four would never return and overnight letters began pouring into the offices of Kenin, Wirtz and President Johnson. While the *Variety* article and the article by Riesel certainly portrayed the issue as a crisis for the musicians' union, but it was nothing compared to the impact of Kenin's own words. It was Kenin himself, not the Beatles, who created a crisis for the AFM, because his comments on the Beatles seriously damaged the image of the AFM in the minds of young rock and roll fans. Kenin had no idea that he was causing a major controversy, because he assumed, wrongly, that taking the high road on "culture" was the best strategy for the musicians' union, since he believed that positioning the union as a gatekeeper of American "values" would give him leverage in his negotiations with the State and Labor Departments in Washington, D.C. He had no idea that young rock and roll fans would also lobby the Secretary of Labor, and take him to task over the issue of "culture."

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[244] *Variety*, 234:49 March 25, 1964 p .

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[245] *National Archives and Records Administration* Record Group 174, Stack Area 530, Row 47, Compartment 48, Shelf 7, Box 165 "Employment Security."

[246] "Keeping Out the Beatles," by Victor Riesel. *National Archives and Records Administration*, Record Group 174, Stack Area 530, Row 47, Shelf 7, Box 164 "Beatles."

Beatle-niks focused in on two particular comments made by Kenin in Riesel's article, comments that emphasized the issue of culture. In the first, Kenin says, "The Beatles are not immortal to us… *We don't consider them unique*. They are musicians and only sing incidentally. *We can go to Yonkers or Tennessee and pick up four kids who can do this kind of stuff*. Guitars are now on the ascendancy in this country (emphasis mine).[247]" Kenin betrayed his age and "squareness" with the last comment on guitars, since guitars and rock and roll were on the "ascendancy" long before 1964. Perhaps

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[247] *Ibid*

Kenin was finally facing up to his denial that rock and roll was never a fad. His claim that anybody in the states could reproduce the energy and music of the Beatles was ridiculous, and perhaps he knew as much, but nonetheless he hoped that with the help of the State Department he could repel the second coming of rock and roll. To rock and roll fans, Kenin's reference to "guitar music" proved to them that the musicians' union was living in the past, with the rest of the "square" adult world. Also with Kenin's comments on the Beatles, it seemed as if the musicians' union's position on culture and the masses had come full circle since its convention in 1901, where the union made it a policy to intervene in American society on matters of musical taste among the masses. American teen-agers sensed that Kenin and the musicians' union was preaching to them about the supposed virtues "high culture," and they resisted it as so much dogma from as ossified establishment. For instance, the letter from the three Dayton teenagers above vows that American teen-agers would resist the musicians' union's attempt to "culturize" them. Most of the letters from Beatles fans questioned the union's legitimacy as gatekeepers of culture. In the minds of young rock fans, who gave the musicians' union the right to tell them what kind of music they should listen to? In the second controversial passage from Riesel's article, Kenin positions the union unequivocally as anti-rock and roll:

> Of course we have a cultural exchange with other countries, *but this* [rock and roll] *is not culture. They [the Beatles] are no Rubinsteins or Heifetzes*. Artists are welcome. But as for the Beatles, if they do get back into the country, they're going to have to leave their instruments at home… They [the Beatles] were here before we realized what happened, but it won't happen again (emphasis mine).[248]

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[248] *Ibid*

It was clear that the musicians' union was viewed as a reactionary voice based on the way in which teenage rock and roll fans focused on the struggle over how to define "culture." The musicians' union had made use of the conservative definition of culture as something akin to refined aesthetic taste as well as a definition of culture that appealed to traditional conservative, formalist ideals that found the "essence" of "mature," or "Enlightened" mankind in the works of the "great" European composers like Beethoven, Bach and Brahms. On the other hand, teenagers were adopting a more relativistic notion of culture, similar to an anthropological or sociological definition of culture. Paula Victor a teenager from Rochester, New York wrote to Wirtz that the labor agreement regarding the Beatles was grounded upon serious mistakes in the reasoning about the content of the very concept "culture." She writes,

> Sir:
>
> The undersigned and I respectfully wish to disagree with Mr. Kenin's reasoning and should like to submit our own reasons for doing so.
> Because the decision seems to rest on the question of what is culture, we have tried to get an idea of what culture is. Briefly, we feel that culture consists of all those activities, which express the personality of an age. With this definition in mind, we feel that what the Beatles do is a cultural activity. Without any disrespect to musicians [AFM] and their cultural function, we think that the art form the Beatles perform is a combination of instrument playing and singing. We particularly feel that their performance is not interchangeable with any other group of its kind.
>
> We should like to add that most of us consider ourselves moderately well rounded and are able to appreciate a wide variety of cultural expressions.
>
> On the basis of our above remarks, we respectfully submit our request to readmit the Beatles without restriction.

Very Sincerely,
Paula Victor
(Age 14)[249]

The emphasis on "activities of an age," sums up nicely the impending cultural conflict between the labor movement and the counter-culture during the 1960s, a conflict foreshadowed by the musicians' union's ban on the Beatles. Miss Victor, and teenagers like her, made an important intervention in the culture wars over rock and roll because she shifted the definition of culture from one grounded in the hierarchical divide between the "high" art of the elite, and the popular art of the masses to a relativistic and inclusive concept of culture. "Culture" as Beatles fans understood it, was not about ranking musical expression from high to low, nor was it about whether someone possessed refined taste, whatever that may be. Rather, in a sociological manner, "culture" was understood to be a collection of activities that expressed "the personality of an age." Paula Victor also positioned herself as a "well rounded" consumer of culture, insinuating that to be a "cultured" person, one must have an open mind to all sorts of music. The musicians' union, on the other hand, was positioned as a conservative, closed-minded institution, and therefore as culturally backward, or *un*cultured precisely because of their closed mindedness. In short, an open mind was seen as a necessary condition for the consumption and accumulation of culture that make a well rounded, "cultured" person. Young people were aware of the terms of the debate over rock and roll. It was clearly a fight over which meaning of culture would dominate the other. Debbie Otto, a rock and roll enthusiast from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, also questioned the use of the term

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[249] *National Archives and Records Administration* Record Group 174, Stack Area 530, Row 47, Compartment 48, Shelf 7, Box 165 "Employment Security."

"culture," when she wrote, "President of AFM, Mr. Kenin says they [Beatles] aren't culture. What is culture? Who's to say what culture is? Not you or I."[250] Other young rock and roll fans tried to use relativism in a diplomatic approach. Christine Smith, from Haneoije Falls, N.Y., wrote to Wirtz that, "I enjoy some professional music. Strains from 'Camelot,' 'The Sound of Music,' 'South Pacific,' and concerts by Leonard Bernstein are great to me. However I enjoy some other kinds of music too, and the Beatles provide that so well."[251]

"Culture," as Raymond Williams has argued, is "one of the most complicated words in the English language[252]." The Latin root of the word "culture" is "*colere*," which means inhabit, protect, honor, cultivate and worship. These different meanings eventually were separated into different words, where for example, the meaning "inhabit" branched off to its own word, "colony." The "worship" meaning in the word *colere* became the word "cult." As Williams shows, the principle meaning of culture in its earliest usages in English all tended toward connoting the concept of tending to the *development* and care of something, either crops, animals or people. The word culture became an independent noun – as opposed to signifying something else - sometime during the 18th century. We have now, in the modern usage of the term culture, three meanings: "(i) the independent and abstract noun which describes a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development…(ii) the independent noun, whether used generally or specifically, which indicates a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general…(iii) the independent and abstract noun which describes the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity[253].” According to Williams, the third meaning, which is linked closely to the first, is now the dominant meaning in modern English, although the third meaning came along relatively late, in the mid to late 19th century. The second meaning is embedded in a spatial concept of relativity, whereas the third meaning is temporal and signifies the development of something through time, and implicitly means progress and implies that something becomes *better*. For our purposes here, it’s clear that the musicians’ union was appropriating the third meaning, while rock and roll fans appropriated the second. It’s also no coincidence that the musicians’ union appropriated the third meaning, which came into being in the late 19th century precisely the same time that cultural hierarchy was solidified in American society. It was also during the 19th century that culture became linked to the concept civilization, which together with the word culture created the condition for an elitist notion of culture, in so far as it connotes something or someone who is “civilized” as opposed to “savage.” It is precisely these terms – civilized and savage – that were center stage in both the jazz and rock and roll controversies in America, and the musicians’ union was part of the conservative movement that coded jazz and rock and roll music as “savage.”

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[250] *Ibid*
[251] *Ibid*
[252] See Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1983).

The challenge posed by Paula Victor, Debbie Otto and Christine Smith, went beyond the particular issue of the Beatles. The struggle over the Beatles was one among many such struggles, and the efforts of Beatle-niks represented the contested social climate of the sixties in general. The lunch counter sit ins and the freedom rides of the Civil Rights movement in the early 1960s and the Free Speech Movement on the college campus of UC Berkeley in ‘64 and the social upheaval of other student civil disobedience activities that followed suit, had a profound impact on youth culture and rock and roll music in the U.S. Of course, the influences went the other way as well: rock and roll music contributed to the zeitgeist of social protest in the sixties. While the Beatles themselves weren't singing about the Civil Rights Movement, or the Student Free Speech Movement – at least not in 1964 - they did represent cultural change, and the oppositional stance of the youth culture against the establishment. Furthermore, the Beatles tour took place the same year that the Civil Rights Act was passed, which became ingrained permanently in the national consciousness of young Americans, and the Beatles very first album that was released in the United States – *Introducing…. The Beatles* – was released by Vee Jay Records, an African-American owned record company. That album was mostly covers of Little Richard and Chuck Berry songs, and it introduced many white middle class kids to African American music for the first time, helping to re-popularize and "re-legitimate" African-American rock and roll music among white suburban rock fans. Also, and this point is key, the counterculture would not have been the same without the innovative recordings of the Beatles, including *Rubber Soul*, *Revolve*r – both released in 1966 – and one of the most influential albums of the countercultural era, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club* band released in 1967. In short, for many kids in the United States, the Beatles represented change, and it was perhaps the first time that young people would become a major player in American politics. In the letter by Paula Victor above, she says that culture, "consists of all those activities which express the *personality of an age*." Perhaps she wasn't aware of it yet, but her words point to a major source of conflict not only between the musicians' union and Beatles fans, but also between the emerging counter-culture and the labor movement as a whole. The "personality of an age," that Ms. Victor refers to was the combination of the Civil Rights Movement, the Student free speech movement, the anti-Vietnam war movement and the emerging counter-culture, which taken together represented a generational/cultural challenge to the established power structure in the U.S. Included in that establishment were the culturally conservative working class and their labor unions[254]. The AFM was, as was the labor union aristocracy as a whole, an entrenched institution within the conservative cultural establishment that led the backlash against rock and roll in particular and against the counter/youth culture generally. The musicians' union and Kenin represented the "Old" America, the pre-sixties America that was racked with problems of racism, conservatism and corruption. It was a losing effort on the part of the labor movement's aristocracy, however, as we now consider rock and roll a treasured part of our cultural history, and it was partly the efforts of Beatles fans who challenged the musicians' union's attempt to degrade rock and roll that explains how we now view rock and roll in a positive light. Ironically, it was also the Beatles recordings that helped change the attitude of rank and file union members toward rock and roll. When the Beatles released *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* in 1967, it turned heads among many of the younger rank and file members in the union. In the words of an officer from AFM Local 47 in Los Angeles, "it wasn't until *Sgt. Pepper's* that we [the musicians' union] began to consider rock and roll [to be] *real* music.[255]" But in 1964, the culture wars over rock and roll were still at an all time high, and in spite of the fact that some younger rank and file members in the union actually liked rock and roll, the leadership of the union adamantly maintained its anti-rock position.

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[253] *Ibid*, p 90.

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[254] For an extended analysis of the conflict between the counter-culture and the labor unions in the sixties see Peter B. Levy's book, *The New Left and Labor in the 1960s* (University Illinois Press, 1994).

[255] Interview with author.

It's also interesting that in Kenin's comments that appeared in the article by Riesel, he made a reference to the great violinist, Jascha Heifetz in his justification for keeping out the Beatles, because those comments signaled a reversal of sorts in the discourse on culture and union strategy among the AFM leadership that was forged under Petrillo, who was president of the musicians' union from 1940-1958. Kenin, however, broke from Petrillo, and returned to the cultural elitism that characterized Weber's administration, between the years 1901 - 1940. Petrillo had also made many references to Heifetz in the context of statements about culture and union policy, but Petrillo made practically the opposite point on the issue of culture and union strategy. For Kenin, it was important for the musicians' union to make clear distinctions between "cultured" and "uncultured" musicians as a way to develop a labor market strategy to protect the jobs of American musicians from the invasion of "non-talented" foreign musicians. But, in addition to "protecting" the jobs of American musicians, Kenin was, by appropriating a discourse of cultural elitism, attempting to position the musicians' union as a guardian of high culture in America, and that move is precisely what alienated him from both rock and roll fans *and* rock and roll musicians. For Petrillo, on the other hand, the distinctions between high and low/mass culture are harmful to the union because it was precisely these cultural distinctions between so-called highbrow and lowbrow taste that inevitably create divisions among the members of the rank and file of the musicians' union. For Petrillo, the appropriation of a highbrow aesthetic destroys union solidarity to say nothing of the negative impact such elitism has on organizing new members into the union. In other words, making cultural distinctions between "talented" and "untalented" musicians was, in Petrillo's eyes, a *bad* labor market strategy for the union because it bifurcated musicians into a core and peripheral market for music creating a two tier system of labor that inevitably produces unjust inequality among members n the union. Questionable, indeed dubious distinctions between musicians that turn on the question of high art versus low art mutate into unjust mechanisms of remuneration for musical performances. Elitism on issues of taste also leads to favoritism and corruption within the political machinery of the union. Petrillo's favorite rhetorical question on the matter was, "since when is there any difference between Heifetz playing a fiddle and the fiddler in a tavern? They're both musicians[256]." Referring to Heifetz as a "fiddler" rather than a concert violinist underscored the point. Under Petrillo, the musicians' union considered a "non-talented" fiddler who plays mostly in bars or taverns, and Heifetz, a star concert performer, as equally deserving of union protection. One member received the same rights, voice and treatment as the next: "both are musicians." From Petrillo's point of view equal treatment of members promotes union solidarity and creates a tighter labor market for musicians. Kenin's public criticisms of the Beatles and rock and roll music, however, had brought the musicians' union full circle, back to the cultural elitism that President Weber had codified at the 1901 convention when the AFM publicly denounced ragtime music. It's one thing for consumers of music to show their preference for one musician over the next, but from Petrillo's point of view it is suicide for a labor union to rank their members into two tiers corresponding to "deserving" and "less deserving," which is essentially what happens when musicians are labeled "talented" and "untalented." Such divisions are bound to create a climate of demoralization that breaks down union solidarity. Of course Petrillo, like Kenin, would have taken measures to protect the jobs of American musicians under any circumstances, and the Beatles themselves were not members of the American Federation of Musicians when they first arrived, although they did join during their second tour.[257] Still, the question of culture was framed very differently between Kenin and Petrillo. Kenin took the high road of cultural elitism and sided with the famous rank and file members of the union, like Paul Whiteman and Dizzy Gillespie, who had articulated harsh criticisms of the blues and rock and roll music a decade earlier.

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[256] *New York Times*, August 14, 1940, p. 21:8.

Kenin's elitism ultimately contributed to a division among professional musicians in America, especially between established rank and file members of the AFM, and younger rock and roll musicians who were alienated by Kenin's elitism and intolerance, and less likely to join the musicians' union as a result. The Beatles controversy is made more clear by the fact that the Beatles were fans of American rock and roll, influenced profoundly by the black rock and rollers like Chuck Berry and Little Richard, and the Rolling Stones were big fans of African-American blues musicians. Keith Richards, the lead guitarist for the Stones, was a student of the great blues guitarist from the Mississippi Delta, Robert Jordan, and Mick Jagger, the lead singer/front man was fond of Muddy Waters, and it was precisely this groups of musicians, the early African American rock and roll musicians who were marginalized by their own labor representatives, the AFM. It's ironic that the musicians' union in the U.S. condemned and marginalized the same music that British rock bands and rock fans considered the best music in the world.

It's a matter for debate whether or not the British invasion really had a negative impact on the job prospects of American musicians. It is doubtful that the Beatles or any of the British rock bands took jobs away from American musicians, because as the teenagers convincingly articulated in their letters to Kenin and Wirtz, the Beatles really were unique; there really weren't any rock and roll bands in America that could reproduce what the Beatles were doing. Of course, we know that now in hindsight. In fact, a case could be made that the Beatles had the opposite effect: by reviving a passionate interest for rock and roll in the United States after the Payola scandal and the conservative backlash against rock and roll had repressed both record sales and performances of rock and roll, the Beatles had inspired a whole new generation of American rock bands and renewed growth in record sales for American bands and all kinds of music, not only British rock and roll. Just as was the case with Elvis and his cohort, rock and roll fans in the sixties also bought jazz and classical records, because their interest in rock and roll also sparked an interest in other kinds of music, especially for aficionados who studied the history of American music on record. Furthermore, as was pointed out by many of the letters to Kenin, the British had welcomed Elvis, Chuck Berry and Little Richard with open arms in the 1950s, and American rock and roll records were hot commodities all over the world, so it seemed hypocritical not to allow the Beatles to perform in the states.

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[257] On their second U.S. tour the Beatles did join the AFM, but they were never encouraged to be active members or participate in any way with the union. On the contrary, they were forced to join based upon union rules governing traveling bands in the States. Begrudgingly, the union allowed the Beatles to tour.

But the Beatles decided to be diplomatic about the controversy with the musicians' union. In April of '64, faced with an impending ban on his clients, Brian Epstein, the manager of the Beatles, took steps to get around the restrictions outlined in the agreement between the AFM and the BMU. When the Beatles returned to the U.K. after leaving the U.S., Epstein arranged to have American rock bands tour with the Beatles in England, as well as facilitating other tours of U.S. rock and roll bands in the U.K. Epstein also made good on a promise to include American rock bands on the ticket of the any future Beatles tour in the U.S. Also, in May of 1964 the record industry and the television networks put pressure on Secretary Wirtz and the INS to change the status of the Beatles from H (ii) to H (i) so that they Beatles could tour the U.S. freely as entertainers of special merit and unique talent. Capitol records, a U.S. company, had recently acquired the rights to produce and distribute the Beatles' records, and they lobbied Wirtz not to limit future engagements by the Fab Four so as to drum up exposure for the band to help sell new records. Ed Sullivan, of CBS television, also lobbied on behalf of the Beatles, in order to get them to perform on his popular television variety show. So it was the combination of Epstein's attempts to appease the AFM and the BMU, the record and television industries' pressure on the Department of Labor and perhaps most importantly, the thousands of letters from Beatles fans that eventually led to the agreement by the AFM and the Dept. of Labor to allow the Beatles back to America in August, 1964, as uniquely talented performers, or H (i) foreign entertainers. In late May of 1964, Willard Wirtz wrote back to Bonnie Wilkins, the teenager from Dayton, suggesting to her that it was very possible that the Beatles would be allowed to return to the United States.

> Dear Bonnie:
> Thank you and Miss Debbie Page for sending me the petitions urging that the Beatles be allowed to come back to the United States. The determination and ingenuity you demonstrated are very impressive. I also note that thousands of persons have signed your petitions. This is a tremendous showing of interest.
>
> I do not know whether the Beatles will apply to re-enter the United States under the part of the law governed solely by the Immigration and Naturalization Service or under the rules where the Department of Labor gives certain information to the INS. In either case, I assume the Beatles would be permitted to enter the United States again.

> You may be relieved to know that, while the Government of the United States is old, it is not run by old fogies.
> Yours Sincerely,
> Willard Wirtz.

Of course, we know the Beatles did return for more tours, and they helped renew the appetite for rock and roll in America, especially the "authentic" rock and roll of the 1950s as opposed to the "bubble-gum" pop rock that was produced by the collective of song writers who worked in the famous Brill building in New York, including Neil Sedaka, Carol King and Gerry Goffin. The arrival of the Beatles ended the era of Brill building rock and roll and renewed the tension between the American working class youth culture and mainstream society. Rock and roll had its "edge" again when the Beatles brought their version to the states. Their infamous "mop top" hairdos and John Lennon's comparison of the Beatles popularity to that of Jesus Christ, once again placed rock and roll at the center of the culture wars in America. The Beatles controversy also demonstrated quite clearly how the musicians' union was on the conservative side of the culture wars in American society. Although the musicians' union failed to keep the Beatles out of America, they were able to ban another popular British invasion rock and roll band, *the Kinks*. The Kinks were banned by the AFM after Ray Davies, the lead singer and songwriter got into a scuffle with an AFM member on the set of the television show *Hullabaloo* in 1966. The Kinks were not nearly as big as the Beatles, but they did have a number of their singles reach Billboard's top ten, including "You Really Got Me," which went to number one in the U.K, and number 7 in the U.S. in 1964. In 1965 they had two more singles, "All Day and All of the Night," and "Tired of Waiting for You," reach the top ten in the U.S. In 1966, they were at the peak of their popularity in the U.S. when they were invited to appear on ABC's variety television show *Hullabaloo*. There are conflicting accounts of exactly what happened on the set of *Hullabaloo* that eventually led to the ban of the Kinks, but all accounts describe a physical confrontation between the Kinks and a member of the musicians' union who worked on the set of *Hullabaloo*. According to Davies, an AFM member on the set taunted Davies and his band mates by calling them "communists," "limey bastards," and "fairies." According to the AFM, the Kinks were banned from America on the grounds of "unprofessional conduct." Ted Dreber who was Kenin's assistant at the time, claims there is no record of the Kinks "on file" at the musicians' union office, but he did acknowledge the the Kinks were banned from touring the U.S. for more than 4 years based upon the regulations of the Immigration and Naturalization Act[258]. Whatever happened, the Kinks had a reputation for getting into brawls on stage at their performances. There is even an account of the band chasing a reporter down the street after tangling with him during a press conference. Such a notorious reputation made it that much easier for the AFM to ban the Kinks and justify their harsh criticism of rock and roll.

While *Sgt. Pepper's* helped break down aesthetic elitism among the younger members in the musicians' union, it was also an icon for the counter culture, and its role in the counter culture did more to alienate rock and roll from the labor movement as a whole, than its content did in achieving positive recognition from younger members in the rank and file of the AFM. There is a clear change in direction in the music of the Beatles after Bob Dylan introduced them to marijuana and the American counter culture, and while the Beatles' music became more complicated and interesting after their meeting with Bob Dylan, their "improved status" as musicians was offset by their affirmation of the increasingly controversial counter culture. In other words, professional musicians in the states may have given the Beatles more respect as musicians, but their association with the counterculture, and John Lennon's outspoken criticisms of American foreign policy alienated the musicians' union and the AFL-CIO leadership more generally. Although John Lennon had denied it, there was speculation that the second track on *Sgt. Pepper's*, "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds," was a song about an acid trip. The Beatles had tried to maintain a clean public image after the release of Sgt. Pepper's, but when Paul McCartney admitted publicly that the Fab Four had taken LSD, it cemented the connection between rock and roll and drugs in the imagination of the conservative establishment in America. According to McCartney, "It [LSD] opened my eyes. We only use one-tenth of our brains…Just think what we could accomplish if we could tap the hidden part." McCartney's admission made the Beatles once again the center of cultural conflict. The album cover of *Sgt. Pepper's* also created controversy. The album cover is famous – or infamous, depending on your point of view - for its collection of numerous images of celebrities, including movie stars, famous world leaders, Albert Einstein and most "outrageously," Karl Marx. If that weren't provocative enough, at the feet of the band members – who are in the forefront of all the celebrities - lies a neat line of marijuana plants stretching from one side of the picture to the other. The Beatles raised the bar again, only this time with the artistic content of album covers.

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[258] I haven't been able to find any "official" documents regarding the ban on the Kinks, but Ray Davies does talk about it in his autobiography *X-Ray: The Kinks*, (Woodstock, NY, The Overlook Press, 1994.

Although their records weren't burned in massive public bonfires like they were in 1966, when Lennon had compared the Beatles to Jesus Christ, McCartney's admission that the Beatles were drug users once again rallied the ranks of cultural conservatives against rock and roll. Religious leaders were particularly harsh on the Beatles, just as they were in 1966. Billy Graham, the popular television evangelist, took a more diplomatic approach: he led a public prayer for the Beatles.

Also in 1967, George Harrison had made a well-publicized trip to the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco, an area that had become the mecca for hippies and the counterculture in America. That year, the *Washington Post* ran a series of articles about the rock music scene in the Haight, and it helped create a public stir about the threat of the counterculture and drugs. According to the *Post*, hippies were using rock music and underground radio stations to push dope on the kids of America. Nicolas Hoffman, the author of the *Post* series claimed that the hippies were conspiring to infiltrate the communication industries via rock music and FM radio as a means to encourage drug use and take over the imagination of the American youth. While Hoffman's piece was somewhat paranoid in its tone and scope, there was some truth in his allegations that rock musicians were praising the role of drugs in the creation of a new society. The paranoia and hysteria about drug use and rock music became so widespread that Congress decided to investigate the connection between the music industry, rock music and drug use. And it was more of the pesky British bands that were contributing to the controversy. Eric Clapton, the guitar virtuoso from the British rock band *Cream* said publicly, "Ours is a universal problem; how to find peace in a society which we feel to be hostile. We want to express that search in our music since that is our most eloquent voice. We need drugs to help us, to free our minds and our imaginations from the prejudices and snobbery that have been bred into us[259].” Clapton’s comments were eventually brought to the floor of the Senate for discussion and debate about the supposed epidemic of drug use and its spread via rock music. Spiro Agnew, the Vice President of the U.S., also got into the fray. Agnew was among the conservatives who believed rock musicians brainwashed American kids into taking drugs. Speaking at a fund raising event in Las Vegas, Agnew said:

> We may be accused of advocating song censorship for pointing this out…Have you heard the words of some of these songs? The Beatles have a song, which includes the words, “I get by with a little help from my friends, I get high with a little help from my friends.”…Until it was pointed out to me, I never realized that ‘friends’ were assorted drugs[260].

Agnew’s comments came three years after the AFM attempted to ban the Beatles from the U.S., and by then the entire labor movement had joined in on the mania of bashing rock and roll. The musicians’ union was also still doing their best to rid the U.S. of British rock and rollers when they banned the Kinks.

The cultural conservatism of the labor movement as a whole, and their critical attitude toward rock and roll as a vehicle of the counterculture was made explicit when the voice of the official labor movement, the *AFL-CIO News* published an attack on rock and roll in general, and the Rolling Stones in particular, for soliciting drug use as well as all around delinquent behavior[261]. For the leaders of the AFL-CIO as for the rest of the cultural right, rock and roll was associated with long hair, sexual promiscuity, opposition to the Vietnam War and drug consumption. Rightly so, but for labor leaders, these were problems to be overcome. The AFL-CIO leadership supported President Johnson's war plans in Vietnam, and they opposed the libertarian personal politics of the counterculture. On the other side, young people involved in the counter-culture and the anti-war movement came to see the labor movement as part of the problem, part of the establishment in American society, because of the cultural conservatism rampant in the old guard of labor leaders, most of whom were "old white guys were in favor of the war in Vietnam and against drug use and sexual freedom[262]." The problem of rock and roll and the counterculture was also a problem that labor union leaders had with their own rank and file members. Increasingly in the sixties, young rank and file union members embraced the counterculture, which meant smoking pot on and off the job, listening to rock and roll music and identifying less and less with the work place and their own union leadership. Labor leaders blamed rock and roll for contributing to the conditions that made it more difficult to keep rank and file workers in line, literally. Even management of the big corporations were concerned that labor leaders were losing control of their rank and file. Malcolm L. Denise, who was Vice President of the Ford Motor Company complained in 1969 that:

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[259] “The Record Industry and the Drug Epidemic,” *Congressional Record – Senate*. November 21, p. 37853.

[260] Agnew’s words from the Las Vegas speech are published in Jon Weiner’s book, *Come Together: John Lennon in his Time (*New York: Random House, 1984, pp. 139-40).

[261] Morgan, Edward “A Different View of Protesting Youth,” *AFL-CIO News*, Jan. 14, 1967, p 5.

> A few years ago Reuther and his executive board could map the union's course with confidence. Today they seem uncertain. The reason is a big influx of a new breed of union member – a younger, more impatient, less homogeneous, more racially assertive, and less manipulable member – whose attitudes and desires

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[262] For a detailed discussion of the overall conservatism of the labor movement see Paul Buhle, *Taking Care of Business* (New York Monthly Review Press 1999), and for a look at the relationship between the counter-culture and the labor movement see Peter B. Levy, *The New Left and Labor in the 1960s* (Urbana The University of Illinois Press 1994).

> admittedly are not easily read by a sixty-two-year-old labor leader… For that matter, those attitudes and desires are not always so easily understood by us here, either[263].

The estrangement of rock and roll musicians from the American Federation of Musicians was perhaps the sharpest example of the more widespread problem of rank and file disenchantment with union leadership in most labor unions in the late sixties. And, as was the case with the AFM and the major record labels, management at corporations like Ford sided with union leaders against unruly rank and file members, especially the subgroup of rank and file workers called "hippies." According to Aronowitz (1971),

> Hippie is a self-definition for a large number of young workers who spend some of their time smoking marijuana or using such psychogenic drugs as LSD or mescaline…The hippies are tremendously involved with rock music, especially white acid rock such as the Rolling Stones, the Jefferson Airplane, Janis Joplin, and Bob Dylan. Some of them play instruments and dream of becoming professionals… Being "straight" differs little from being "hip" among young people of Lordstown [a GM factory was located in Lordstown, Ohio]. Long hair, marijuana, and rock music is shared by nearly all the young workers in the plant. Still there is a definite distinction between hippies and other young people. They are more aware of alternate political and philosophical ideas. (p 30-1)

We know a lot about how "hippies" dropped out of mainstream society in the late sixties in search of an alternative lifestyle to the boredom and drudgery of everyday life in the U.S., but "hippies" were also a problem for labor leaders concerned with maintaining discipline among the rank and file. The late sixties was a turning point for the labor movement because it signaled the alienation and disenfranchisement of large segments of rand and file members from their own unions, as labor leaders more and more took sides with management against their own rank and file members[264].

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[263] Denise's words are published in *False Promises*: *The Shaping of American Working Class Consciousness*, by Stanley Aronowitz (New York: McGraw-Hill 1971) p 34.

Alienation of young people from the labor movement included rock and roll musicians as much as rock and roll fans who were part of the counter-culture, and that meant that more and more, rock and roll musicians considered the musicians' union irrelevant. In the minds of rock musicians, unions represented, old, conservative white guys, the kind of people who hated rock and roll. As a result rock and roll musicians blew off the musicians' union, if not always in fact, almost always in the imagination. There were instances in the late 1960s where rock and roll musicians were automatically enrolled in the musicians' union if they worked a gig that was a union shop, whether a live venue or a recording session. But for rock and roll musicians, the American Federation of Musicians and its institutions were not part of their culture. That fact was a profound change from a few generations before, where jazz and classical music and the musicians' union were together part of the same culture. The break in culture ultimately lead to a break in business too, as the structure of the music industry changed in profound ways that allowed rock and roll music to grow outside the purview of the musicians' union as more and more rock and roll musicians worked without a union contract and worked without being a member of the union. In short, the cultural break created the conditions for the structural break. It is to that story we now turn.

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[264] For a good discussion of the split between rank and file union members and their leaders, see Alice and Staughton Lynd, *Rank and File* (New York: Monthly Review Press 1973).

CHAPTER SIX:

TURNED ON, TUNED IN, DROPPED OUT: ROCK AND ROLL RESTRUCTURES THE MUSIC INDUSTRY ALONG NON-UNION LINES

"Unlike most of the songs nowadays being written uptown in Tin Pan Alley, that's where folk songs come from these days…this song was not written up there. This song was written somewhere down in the United States."
-- Bob Dylan

When Bob Dylan wrote the lines above, which appear in his 1964 song, "Bob Dylan's Blues," he was commenting on the problem of the alienation of music fans, and commodification of music. With a sharp critique reminiscent of Theodor Adorno, Dylan was criticizing the standardization of folk music by the culture industry[265]. For folk musicians like the early Bob Dylan, authentic folk music comes from the people "somewhere" down in the United States, but when Tin Pan Alley gets a hold of it, and converts it into a standardized, reproducible formula, then the music dies. The more mainstream way of describing the same thing is to say that when a recording artist signs a contract with a major record label, it's an indication that the artist has "sold out." The irony was that Dylan himself recorded for a major label – Columbia – but still, Dylan was situated firmly within the sixties counterculture. Musicians from the counterculture who really care about music, so the argument goes, refuse to let money become more important than the music. Once inside the corporate machine, however, music loses its critical edge, which is another way saying that "popular" music for the "masses" – as opposed to the folk and their "authentic" music - reproduces the status quo of standardization, boredom and ultimately inequality in society. Reproducing the status quo is made possible in part, because the culture industry separates, or alienates the audience from the music and transforms them into passive consumers of music, as opposed to the "authentic" folk tradition that situates the audience as active participants in the process of music construction. The culture industry also transforms authentic music into reproducible formulas that lose all attachment to the referents that first gave birth to the music. In order for music to be able to criticize social relations, and maintain its authenticity, it must remain on the margins of society, just beyond the grasp of the captains of the culture industry in Tin Pan Alley and Hollywood. While there was controversy inside the folk music community over Dylan's choice to go electric and join the ranks of rock and roll musicians, there was a common view in both the folk and rock music circles of the counter culture, that legitimate music for the people, by the people, needed to remain culturally independent of the corporate interests that controlled the major record label companies, Tin Pan Alley, Hollywood, radio and television.

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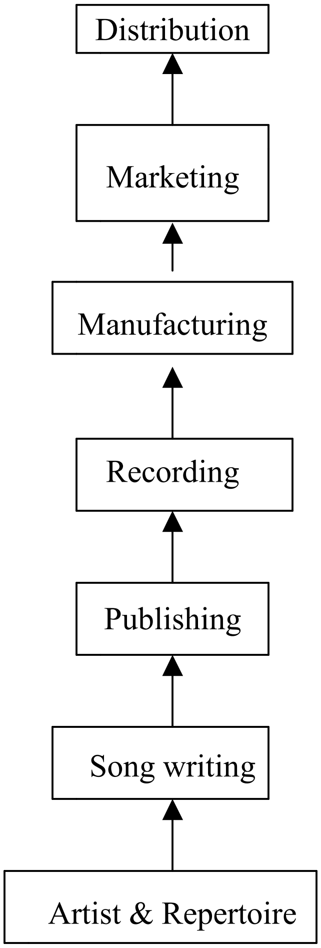
[265] See Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, (New York Routledge)

Ironically, however, Dylan himself, and other so-called counter culture rock and roll musicians were key figures in the corporate transformation of the division of labor in the music industry that ultimately undermined musicians across the board for the benefit of the big companies. Dylan may have been correct to claim that he and his cohort of counter culture musicians were on the outside looking in on American pop *culture*, but they were at the center of the changing *structure* of the business side of things in the music industry. Rock and roll music may in some cases still be a cultural “threat” to the status quo in society, and in the mid 1950s rock and roll music posed a legitimate economic threat to the dominant institutions in the music industry, but the corporate response to rock and roll in the late 1960s profoundly changed the structure of the music industry in ways that softened the edge of rock and roll. In short, not only did the major corporations absorb and defang the culture of rock and roll by the early 1970’s; they also restructured the industry along non-union lines through a strategy of outsourcing the production of records that was, ironically, made possible by rock and roll music.

Vertical integration is no longer the name of the game in the global music industry. It’s no longer the case that a major record label company will supervise all the stages of record production under “one roof,” including song writing, publishing, recording, manufacturing, marketing and distribution. Henry Ford’s model of vertical integration of business operations and the joining of mass production to mass consumption that became the basic template for all American corporations, including the major record labels, fell apart in the early ‘70s. From 1930 to 1960, the major record labels dominated all aspects of the division of labor, along the lines of “Fordism,” a term coined by Gramsci (1971) to describe the regime of capital accumulation in late capitalism. At the bottom, or beginning of the chain of operations was the A&R Department, which was in charge of signing artists to the label roster and developing their sound. At the top of the chain were the distribution functions, and in between were the stages of recording, manufacturing and marketing. See figure 1 below that illustrates the Fordist period of production in the sound recording industry.

Figure 1: Vertical integration of business operations in the music industry: the "Fordist" model.


Distribution
Marketing
Manufacturing
Recording
Publishing
Song writing
Artist & Repertoire

Today, in the music recording industry, production is widely dispersed among so-called independent record companies that serve as non-union subcontractors in the labor system, while distribution is tightly controlled by four corporate conglomerates that dominate the business of music around the entire globe. The transformation of the division of labor in the music industry that displaced the musicians' union from power has been bad news for all musicians, whether or not they were or are union members, because it has created lower wages, deteriorating working conditions and the erosion of benefits for *all* musicians. The great sea change in the organization of business and labor practices in the music industry occurred in the 1960s, during the heyday of rock music. Rock and roll musicians were the unwitting pawns in the strategy of outsourcing production that created a cheap pool of easily exploitable labor in the music industry. In short, the radical transformation of the music industry pivoted upon rock and roll music and musicians. I explain how that happened in this chapter.

Of course rock and roll musicians themselves are not to blame for the changes that have taken place in the structure of the music industry. On the contrary, the musicians' union played an important role, if not the main role in the both transformation of the division of labor in the music industry and the restructuring of ownership patterns, because their rejection of rock and roll music on aesthetic grounds that were rooted in class and race relations, encouraged, albeit unintentionally, the corporations to radically restructure the music industry. The union gave away rock and roll to the record labels. Since rock and roll musicians were made pariahs by the musicians' union, the corporations that sought to get a piece of the rock music pie were able to fold rock music into a new business structure that excluded the union. The older structure of core and periphery in the economy of music production was completely dismantled in the 1960s, displacing the musicians' union from their perch atop the division of labor in the music industry. Rock and roll music, which emerged from the periphery of the music industry, eventually entered the core of the industry and dismantled the exiting division of labor in ways that were bad for all musicians, whether union members or not, because working musicians in the new division of labor no longer have control over the conditions of their work like they once did in the heyday of union power between 1900 and 1940. The price for rejecting rock and roll was nothing less than the end of union power and influence in the music industry and the degradation of working conditions for all musicians in the industry.

In the years prior to the development of sound recording technology, the music industry revolved around the production and sale of printed sheet music and live performances of music for commercial purposes. As a result, the division of labor in the music industry was split between performance and publishing. On the performance side, the American Federation of Musicians, established in 1896, represented the interests of instrumentalists, arrangers and copyists (of sheet music). For more than 40 years since its inception, the union had enough strength to maintain strict control over working conditions in live venues that included hotels, taverns, weddings, bar mitzvahs, and vaudeville theatres all across the country including the Broadway venues in New York that together with the publishing houses from Tin Pan Alley were the epicenter of the music industry between 1880 – 1920. Those years were some of the best years for the musicians' union due to the steady demand for labor that followed from a growing economy and an emerging leisure industry that catered to a growing affluent middle class and relatively more affluent working class in America. On the publishing side were the owners of sheet music and the compositions contained in them that were protected by the Copyright Act of 1790, which was later revised in 1909. These groups included the major publishing companies like Charles K. Harris, Ager, Yellen, & Bornstein Inc., Irving Berlin Inc., Broadway Music Corporation, Remick Mussic Corp., M. Witmark & Sons, Harry Von Tilzer Music Publishing Co., and Harms Inc., as well as famous composers like George Gershwin, Irving Berlin, Shelton Brooks, Albert Von Tilzer, George M. Cohan, Paul Dresser, Walter Donaldson and others. Of course, in many cases, the composers and the publishing firm were one and the same entity, because many song composers also owned their own publishing companies, as was the case with Irving Berlin and Harry Von Tilzer, but more often than not, as the music industry developed, a few publishing houses controlled most of the publishing end, while scores of composers labored under their roof. Publishing houses gave their songwriting staff a share of publishing rights, which typically involved a 50/50 split for the successful writers.

In 1895 several publishing firms established the Music Publishing Association of the United States (MPA) to protect the interests of music publishers and to lobby Congress to revise the Copyright Act in order to extend the lifetime of copyrighted material. The original Copyright Act of 1790 was designed to promote the "progress of science and useful arts in the United States by securing for limited times to authors and inventors the exclusive rights to their writings and discoveries." The problem for music publishers in 1895 was the clause "limited times." The MPA wanted Congress to extend the lifetime of copyrighted music to 40 years. Eventually, the Copyright Act was revised in 1909, and a compromise was reached that granted authors exclusive rights to their compositions for 28 years, with the option to renew for another 28 years. Also, in the revised version of the Copyright Act was a section that granted publishing rights in the new medium: records. The new publishing rights were called "mechanical" rights, which gave legal protection to authors of music that was reproduced mechanically on records. The other major musicians' organization that emerged near the turn of the century was the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), which formed in

1914 to protect the copyrights of songwriters as well as to balance the power between publishers, composers and authors. ASCAP was not legally a labor union; rather, they more resembled a guild, but there was significant overlap between organizations since many AFM members were also members of ASCAP, and the two groups were more often than not on the same side of the fence during the major labor struggles against their main employers, the National Association of Broadcasters and the Recording Industry Association of American (RIAA) in the 1930s and 1940s. The AFM and ASCAP emerged together as the two principle organizations that represented the interests of labor in the burgeoning music industry in the early years of the 20th century, although largely as the dependent variables in the structure of business organization. Together with the NAB, the RIAA and the management and employers groups from the publishing houses, vaudeville theaters, the AFM and ASCAP formed the core of the music industry that remained intact until the late 1950s. Independent record labels, independent distributors, independent radio stations, blues musicians, hillbilly and folk musicians all remained on the periphery of the music industry until rock and roll upended everything in the fifties.

The geographic and cultural epicenter of the music industry in the late 1890s was New York City, in an area around the intersection of 28th Street and Broadway, a city block that most of the big-name music publishing companies called home. The area was given the nickname “Tin Pan Alley,” because the sound coming from a manifold of pianos banging out new tunes poured through the windows of buildings up and down 28th Street created a cacophony that resembled the clanging of so many tin pans. The songwriters and publishers of Tin Pan Alley formed a network with Broadway musicians and singers working the Vaudeville houses to promote their music. Composers and publishing firms that were looking to promote their new songs hired singers and pianists called “song pushers,” to travel the vaudeville circuit promoting the new songs. In other cases, publishers and composers would hire an already existing star performer like Al Jolson, and pay them – well - to perform their songs, or offer them a cut of the publishing royalties. The practice of song pushing later became known as payola after the invention of radio. “Second-rate” vaudeville performers who traveled to New York would pass through Tin Pan Alley in search of new material to perform but they would have to pay for new music. Around the turn of the century the audiences that attended vaudeville shows, were drawn primarily form the middle class, and consequently the shows and the music reflected the values and sensibilities of white middle class America. Thus the first commercially successful “popular” music wasn’t exactly music for the masses, since the target demographic was quite specific: white middle class.

By 1900, the network of vaudeville theatres and Tin Pan Alley songwriters and publishers of sheet music grew into a multi-million dollar business. The first vaudeville theatre in the U.S. was Tony Pastor’s Opera House, which was located in the Bowery section of Manhattan. It opened in 1865. By the turn of the century two chains dominated the vaudeville industry, the Keith-Albee chain that had theatres on the East and West coasts, and Martin Beck’s Orpheum circuit, which stretched from Chicago to San Francisco. In an effort to keep its mainly middle class audience, the Ketih-Albee chain’s advertising slogan was “Cleanliness, Courtesy and Comfort.” Stage performers, singers and musicians who found work in vaudeville had unprecedented access to an affluent, white middle class audience and their music reflected the particular demands of that specific demographic cross section of the country. As a result, most of the songs were melodramatic ballads and comic novelty songs. When Tin Pan Alley was consolidating its economic power over the music industry during that era, European Opera was considered the new standard for "good taste," so in addition to melodramatic ballads and comic novelty tunes, dance waltzes and marching band music became standard fare for Tin Pan Alley composers as they attempted to combine so-called popular tunes with traditional symphonic arrangements. Eventually Tin Pan Alley included "rag" tunes in their repertoire, tunes that were loosely based upon ragtime music, but the formula of the Tin Pan Alley songs remained largely unchanged. Some of the popular tunes from the early days of Tin Pan Alley were Harry Von Tilzer's "Bird in a Golden Cage," written in 1900, George Evans' "In the Good Ole Summer Time," (1902), and Egbert Van Alstyne's "In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree," (1905). Each one of these compositions sold more than a million copies in sheet music, which at a price between 30 and 40 cents a sheet was very good money. Other popular songs that sold well in sheet music were George M Cohan's "Give My Regards to Broadway," (1904), Irving Berlin's "Alexander's Ragtime Band," (1911) and Cohan's patriotic, wartime tune, "Over There," (1917).

In addition to the white middle class audience of the vaudeville industry, the other cultural epicenter of Tin Pan Alley was the bourgeois home, which taken collectively, was the main consumer of sheet music in America. The centerpiece of entertainment in the bourgeois home was the piano, a prime symbol of upward mobility for the middle class, since it signified a certain level of income, education and "cultural refinement." The piano combined physical and cultural capital, because it was relatively expensive and it required a certain amount of "training" in order to play it. By 1880, the major manufacturers of pianos were producing 45,000 pianos a year, which guaranteed a steady income for Tin Pan Alley publishers of sheet music. The combination of the piano and sheet music remained the principle driving force of the music industry until the 1920s when the Victrola Talking Machine and flat disc records eventually replaced sheet music and the piano as the main status symbols and entertainment fixtures of the bourgeois home.

Thus, the network of Tin Pan Alley composers, theatre musicians and middle class domestic consumers in the bourgeois household shaped the content of the American music industry between 1880 and 1920.

The development of sound recording technologies also had an effect on “popular” music, but that effect remained peripheral until the 1940s. The core of the music industry from the late 1880s to the late 1920s consisted of members of ASCAP, the AFM, Tin Pan Alley publishing firms and the owners of the vaudeville chains. The medium at the center of the industry was still sheet music. As a result, the main groups of “workers” in the industry were either the owners of the compositions embodied on sheet music who were represented by ASCAP, or the musicians who performed and interpreted the sheet music, who were represented by the AFM. Of course, many members of ASCAP were also members of the AFM. The music associated with the working class - blues music and hillbilly - music languished on the periphery of the music industry during these years because the tastemakers of Tin Pan Alley considered that kind of music worthless, but also because the working class music of that era, especially the blues was difficult to represent graphically, by notation on sheet music. Blues and hillbilly music in the early days was not preserved in notational form on paper because most of the music came from an oral tradition among rural folk in the South, which emphasizes improvisation on the one hand, and the bending or "blueing" of notes on the other. The practice of bending notes was foreign to the tastemakers of Tin Pan Alley. Blue notes, which are notes that are "bent," or change in pitch as a result of bending guitar and banjo strings, were, and remain main staples of rural working class music. Not only did bourgeois taste makers lack an ear for blue notes, it was also nearly impossible to (re)present a bending note on a sheet of music. Furthermore, most rural working class musicians in the South didn't read music, which created more incompatibility between the core and periphery of the music industry. Reading sheet music was one of the membership requirements for the musicians' union at that time. The schism between the type of music in the core and periphery of the music industry was reflected in the membership of the AFM and ASCAP. In 1919, ASCAP had achieved control over the content of music industry with a very narrow demographic group: white, middle class professional men. While ASCAP was collecting royalties on 90% of all the sheet music sold in America, it had only 6 blacks among its more than 170-chartered members[266]. The musicians' union, too, had a very exclusive group, barring membership to musicians who did not read sheet music, and maintaining separate locals for African American musicians.

At first, the sound and later music recording industry developed separately from the music publishing industry of Tin Pan Alley. When Edison first developed the technology to record and play back sound, he thought it would be used mainly to record important political speeches of the day for posterity. He also thought the technology could be used commercially to record dictation by business leaders that would later be converted into memos, or replace memos altogether. Recording music was way down

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[266] See Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton 1971.) p 353.

Edison's list for practical applications of his technology, which is why he called his first sound recording invention in 1877 a "talking machine." The first commercial application of music recording technology occurred in penny arcades as early as 1889, when Louis Glass installed a "dictating machine" in the Palais Royal Saloon in San Francisco. Glass, who was a manager for the Pacific Phonograph Company, was the first person to figure out how to connect a coin operating mechanism to the talking machine. For the cost of one nickel, patrons at the Palais Royal Saloon could listen to recorded music through listening tubes that were shaped like a stethoscope. Glass' application was a huge success, and within a year he installed eight more machines in California, which generated 1,200 dollars a year. Glass is widely considered the "father of the jukebox."

Still, even though the early jukeboxes were popular at the penny arcades during the turn of the century, recording technologies remained crude until the late 1920s. Improvements to Edison's invention were slow, but steady. Emile Berliner's innovative flat discs, first patented in 1896, which were made of wax coated zinc were a big improvement over Edison's tinfoil cylinders, because they produced a much louder playback sound, and they could be easily mass produced. In spite of these improvements, they still relied an acoustic recording techniques that limited the quality of recordings. Berliner's flat disc invention would eventually become the standard design, and make records a profitable commodity, but recording technology did not threaten to significantly change the music industry between 1880 and 1920, because acoustic recording techniques severely limited the possibilities for recording and reproducing music. Before the invention of electronic recording technologies in the twenties, singers and instruments had to be very close to the recording horn, and low pitch sounds from drums and acoustic basses were barely audible when played back through the talking machines. Brass instruments were the best suited for early acoustic recording technology, and as a result, the first popular recording star was John Philip Sousa, who recorded brass marching band arrangements for Columbia records in the 1890s. For most music consumers, however, live music was preferred to records, which remained mostly a curiosity for patrons at penny arcades until electronic recording technologies that were developed in the 1920s dramatically improved the quality of records. In the early days of the record industry before electronic recording, members of ASCAP and the AFM did not consider records to be a viable commercial enterprise, so although their members did make recordings, and did secure publishing rights in the new medium, nobody thought that records would ever threaten the demand for the live performance of music, nor the demand for sheet music.

The establishment of the Victor Talking Machine Company in 1901 marked the beginning of a viable recording industry, because Victor, Columbia and Edison – the "big three" recording companies at the time - combined their patents to create better recording machines and more affordable discs. Once the big three agreed to use Berliner's designs, sales for flat discs began to climb, mostly as a result of the early jukeboxes, because talking machines for home use remained a novelty in the homes of well-to-do families until the 1920s. The first Victrola Talking machines were very expensive; at 200 dollars each the machine was not a viable commodity for mass production. The first generation of talking machines sold to consumers was more status symbol than functional equipment for family entertainment. Eventually, however, record-playing talking machines achieved equal status to the piano, as a symbol of upward mobility in the middle class home, and they anchored the family parlor room much the same was as the piano had since the mid 1800s. The talking machines were big, about four feet high, made of high quality wood, making them as much a piece of furniture as a source of entertainment. With the development of electronic recording processes, the talking machines both shrank in size and provided a more "serious" form of entertainment that challenged the status of the piano. When talking machines and records began to threaten sales for pianos and sheet music, ASCAP as well as the AFM began planning their responses to the technology that would transform the structure of the music industry.

Two engineers from Western Electric named Joseph Maxfield and H. Harrison initially developed electronic recording technologies for the radio industry that would eventually have repercussions for the record industry as well. When radio was developed in the 1920s, the recording industry companies viewed radio as a threat, and it was. Live music broadcast over the radio sounded much better than records, and the music was free. In 1921, at the beginning of the public's craze for radio, there were roughly 250,000 households with radio sets in the U.S. By 1922 the number of houses with radio sets grew to over 400,000. Also during those years, there was a noticeable decline in the sale of pianos, sheet music and talking machines. By 1924 record sales at Victor were down 60% and at Edison sales were down 50%[267]. On the other hand, the popularity of radio was good for the AFM, which had members in staff orchestras at nearly all the radio stations that had mid sized markets. ASCAP did well with radio as well, since the organization was able to coerce radio station operators to pay a fee to use their compositions, whether on records or performed live by AFM members. The popularity of radio was bad news for the recording industry at first because it contributed to the significant drop in record sales in the 1920s, but the development of electronic recording, which resulted from the development of amplified microphones for radio broadcasting, ultimately benefited the record industry. The new electronic technologies used a condenser microphone to pick up sound and transfer it into electric currents, much like the mouthpiece of a telephone. The electric currents were then amplified by means of a vacuum tube that drove an electro-mechanical cutter that cut groves in the flat discs. When the discs were played back through the new electronic talking machines, the needle of the player was guided by a magnetic field in the pickup as it moved through the grooves of the record to reproduce the currents that created the sound from the recording process. It was a huge improvement for the quality of records. At first, the new technology was very expensive, and it forced many smaller record companies who could not afford it to drop out of the industry.

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[267] See Andre Millard, *America on Record: A History of Recorded Sound* (New York Cambridge Press) p. 141.

None of these technologies, however, significantly altered the division of labor in the core structure of the music industry, which remained mostly intact since 1880. There were some serious conflicts between labor and capital that resulted from the development of radio and recording technologies during these years, but the distribution of power and the core structure was not significantly altered. In the early days of radio, ASCAP had a major battle with the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), which represented the interests of management in radio, but ASCAP was, with the help of Congress in 1934, able to force NAB to conform to the regulations of the 1909 Copyright Act, and pay ASCAP a fee for broadcasting copyrighted music in both live performances as well as mechanically via records. After the passage of the Communications Act in 1934, which created the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), ASCAP grew rich off radio. The American Federation of Musicians was also embroiled in labor disputes with NAB and the recording industry, but like ASCAP, the AFM was able to get both the radio and recording industry to come to terms with their demands. Several strikes at local radio stations that resulted in victory for the union guaranteed steady income for union musicians during the golden years of radio, and a successful strike on the recording industry resulted in the institution of a royalty system for the union, which resulted in significant income for the musicians' union. Record sales, and the use of records on radio did have a negative effect on job prospects for AFM members in out of the way places in small town America, but the new technologies were a boon for the elite musicians working in the media centers in New York, Chicago, Nashville, Kansas City, Los Angeles and New Orleans. Power inside the union shifted toward musicians working in the media centers, but Petrillo, and the famous rank and file musicians took measures to protect the interests of members out on the periphery of the industry. The musicians' union victory in the recording ban of 1942 allowed the AFM leadership to help their members who were losing jobs because of the use of records on radio, because the AFM used and still uses the revenue from the royalty system to pay its unemployed and underemployed members for public performances of live music that is free to the public. So, while the AFM lost members on the periphery of the music industry, they maintained their power in the music industry because their members had a lock on the labor market in the media centers, which formed the core of the industry. In fact, ASCAP and the AFM adapted quite well to the new technologies in such a way as to preserve the basic economic structure of the music industry that kept them in the core.

The AFM and ASCAP maintained power in part, because radio and the recording industry remained in competition until the 1940s. At first, three companies dominated the recording industry, Edison, Columbia and Victor, and they were referred to as the majors because they were vertically integrated and maintained a virtual monopoly on the industry through control over recording, manufacturing and distribution of records. There were a handful of independent record companies, but the Great Depression completely wiped them out. The combination of the popularity of radio and the great Depression caused a serious setback for the major record companies as well, but when the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) purchased Victor talking-machine company in 1929, a new radio/record network was established that would eventually alter the structure of the music industry. Corporations that dominated radio like RCA and Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) began to develop an interest in recording and purchased record companies in large numbers beginning in the 1930s. CBS radio, in an attempt not to be left behind by the behemoth RCA/Victor, purchased the American Record Corporation, which in turn owned both the Brunswick label and the Columbia Phonograph Company, in 1938. The merger of radio and recording interests like RCA/Victor, and the CBS empire, changed the formerly competitive relationship between radio and recording into a partnership with shared assets. The new radio/record corporate conglomerates also bought out many publishing firms, creating a vertical integration of business practices in the music industry. The giant corporations controlled every aspect of the industry: songwriting, publishing, performance, recording, broadcasting, manufacturing and distribution, the classic example of vertical integration of business operations and control over industry via oligopoly.

The other major technological development that had a profound effect on the entertainment industry as a whole was the development of “talkies,” or movies with sound, a technology that was also developed in the 1920s. Movies with sound were a mixed bag for ASCAP and the AFM. The musicians’ union lost thousands of jobs in silent movie houses as a result of “talkies,” but ASCAP songwriters were able to use Hollywood to disseminate their music, creating an alliance between Tin Pan Alley and Hollywood. AFM members too, were able to gain a secure foothold in Hollywood studios as session musicians recording musical scores for the new “talkies,” and the new network between Hollywood-Tin Pan Alley and radio kept ASCAP and the AFM in the core of the music industry, although as dependent variables in relationship to the new ownership patterns created by the partnership of film, radio and recording capital. Talkies also allowed Hollywood to get into the recording industry, when Warner Bros. and MGM created their own record labels that were distinct divisions of their operations. Thus, by the 1940s, there were five major record labels, RCA/Victor, CBS, Decca, Warner Bros. and MGM. Going into the 1940s, the AFM successfully negotiated new relationships with the major record labels, RCA/Victor, CBS and Decca records as well as with the three big radio networks, NBC, CBS, and Mutual Broadcasting System (MBS). It seemed then, that the AFM had secured a bright future for its members in the forties, but in the music industry things change very fast. Significant developments of technology and musical taste would once again destroy the fragile truce between the musicians’ union and the major record labels.

The three technological developments that had the most significant impact on the structure of the music recording industry occurred in the mid 1940s: the development of television, the creation of the 45 rpm, and 33 1/3 rpm discs, and the discovery of magnetic tape recording technology recovered from Germany by the Allied Powers at the end of World War II. The new magnetic tape technology dramatically improved music recording techniques while simultaneously reducing the cost of music recording. The magnetophone, first developed in Germany, used a plastic tape that was coated with iron oxide, which magnetized the tape allowing it to be encoded by amplified electrical impulses. The use magnetic tape technology in music recording created higher quality sound recordings and it was relatively cheap and easy to use, which meant people with lesser means could jump into the music recording industry, since it took much less capital to start an independent record company. The creation of small durable discs that spun at 45 rpm, also made it easier to go into business because the records were much more durable, which meant far fewer were destroyed in shipping and far more could fit into jukeboxes. Plus the sounded much better than the older 78 rpm records. The 45-rpm record was a boon to both the jukebox industry and the independent record companies. Partly as a result of these new technologies, in the mid to late 1940s there was a significant growth in the number of independent record labels, which signaled a comeback for the independents, since most of the independent companies had been wiped out by the Depression, the popularity of radio and the formerly expensive electronic recording technologies. In the 1940s close to 1,000 new independent record companies emerged, and although many would go out of business in less than a year, there were many that became quite successful. The year 1947 was a turn around year for the recording industry as sales for discs finally broke the threshold reached back in 1921, before radio and the Depression contributed to a serious decline in the demand for music on record. In 1921 record sales topped $105.6 million in retail sales, which remained the high mark for more than twenty years until the market blew up over $215.4 million in retail sales in 1947[268]. The increase in sales was partly due to the release of pent up consumer demand after the war, but also a result of the improved quality of records, the growth of the jukebox industry, and the radio/recording industry partnerships as well as the explosion in independent radio stations.

The musicians' union was still in relatively good shape in 1947, having emerged victorious in two strikes on the recording industry in 1942 and 1946. As a result of the victory in the 1942 and '46 recording bans, the musicians' union was able to sign more than 200 record labels to their labor agreement by 1947[269]. The AFM also held its ground in radio, placing members at numerous radio stations across the country, where by 1948 there were some 70 million radio sets in 37 million households. The AFM was at the pinnacle of their power in the recording industry that year, since they had a labor contract with all the major record labels and most of the important independent labels. The mid 1940s were good for ASCAP as well. Between 1941 and 1947 ASCAP collected $39.6 million for its 300 members.

Things would change radically in the next decade, however, as a result of the corporate restructuring of the record industry on the one hand, and perhaps more importantly the decline in organizing efforts by the AFM in the 1950s. Like most labor unions in the 1950s, the AFM had become more of a service providing institution, than a labor organizing institution. Rather than commit resources to organizing new musicians, especially rock and roll musicians, the AFM focused on providing services to its existing members, and devoted more resources to contract negotiations and enforcement, than to organizing. The shift from organizing to service provision that characterized the labor movement as a whole after the fifties has been referred to as a shift from "social movement unionism," to "business unionism[270]." While the musicians' union was feeling confident with its position in the music industry, the development of television led to significant changes in radio formats that contributed to the rise of rock and roll music, which the union completely ignored.

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[268] See Russell Sanjek, *Pennies From Heaven: The American Popular Music Business in the Twentieth Century* (New York Da Capo Press 1996) *p*. 285

[269] *Ibid.*

The development of television in the 1940s combined with the emergence of numerous new radio stations that occurred when the FCC finally granted licenses to applicants who were denied during the war, radically transformed the programming content of radio, which in turn opened up new opportunities for independent record labels, particularly those that specialized in rhythm and blues and rock and roll music. When television broke, NBC and CBS moved their variety shows, news shows and game shows over to the new medium leaving a gaping whole in radio programming. Music, especially recorded music, filled much of that that gap. After television, radio became a much more fragmented market, with several local market niches' replacing the network shows and remote broadcasts. Smaller radio stations in local markets were left with a much larger audience after the creation of television. When the interracial audience for rhythm and blues music grew by leaps and bounds after getting turned on by the radio stations that oriented their programming content primarily toward jump blues records, the independent record companies, their distributors and independent retail stores cashed in on the new consumer demographic of white and black, working and middle class teens and adults who were demanding more rock and roll. The indies were able to cash in because the major record labels, mainstream network radio and Tin Pan Alley was continuing to ignore jump blues, rhythm and blues and rock and roll music. There was an attempt by the majors to capture the country western market in the early 1950s, but jump blues and folk music market remained on the periphery, at least until the mid 1950s. While record sales for jump blues increased steeply between the mid 1940s and early 1950s, the phenomenon did not attract the attention of the majors until the mid 1950s, when rock and roll garnered fully half of the market for recorded music. As late as the mid 1940s classical music still took nearly 40% of the market for records, and sales remained brisk particularly after the development of the long playing album, or LP, which allowed for the recording of entire symphonic compositions, rather than snippets of the works of the classical composers. Played back at 33 1/3 rpm, these records could hold an entire symphonic composition, like Beethoven's fifth and seventh symphonies, which was a boon for sales of classical recordings. Today, however, to give you an idea of how much the market of music has changed, classical and jazz music *combined* is mere 7% of the market for recorded music.

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[270] See Kim Moody, *An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unionism*, (New York Verso 1988), Stanley Aronowitz, *False Promises: The Shaping of American Working Class Consciousness* (New York MgGraw-Hill 1973), and Paul Buhle, *Taking Care of Business: Samuel Gompers, George Meany, Lane Kirkland, and the the Tragedy of American Labor* (New York Monthly Review Press 1999).

In the period between 1948 and 1955, four firms dominated the music recording industry: RCA/Victor, Columbia, Capitol, and Decca. These four firms, the majors, captured 80% of the marked for recorded music. They were referred to as "major" record labels because they had the resources to run their own production, marketing and distribution departments in addition to A&R and songwriting. Capitol Records was formed in 1942 by two songwriters, Johnny Mercer and Buddy De Slyva, and a record retailer, Glenn Wallichs. Capitol didn't hit it big until the early 1950s when Frank Sinatra recorded 13 top five albums for the label. Sinatra would later form his own label, Reprise records, that itself became part of Warner in the early 70s.   In 1955, the British company EMI bought a controlling interest in Capitol that remains to this day. In the decade that spanned the mid 1940s to the mid 1950s, the major companies controlled the industry via vertical integration, controlling everything from artistic factors like song writing and recording to business factors like publishing, manufacturing, marketing, merchandising and distribution. This period represented the classical model of monopolistic vertical integration. During this period the major firms developed a closed system of in house production. Performers, writers, producers, engineers, publishers, and the staff in charge of marketing and distribution all worked under the roof of one of the four the major record labels. In short, the majors took over the entire production system of music to completely control the music industry. It was a typical "Fordist" model.

In the 1950s as radio stations began to target specialized markets for specific audiences, a growing number of independent labels challenged the power of the majors. The break up of radio from one large national market into discrete local markets forced the majors to compete with a growing number of independent record companies that were producing rhythm and blues, and rock n roll.

While the new music became very popular, capturing a large slice of the market, most of this new music, since it had a rough working class edge, as well as a distinctly "black" sound, was still recorded exclusively by independent labels on the periphery of the industry. There were six main geographic areas were the production of rock and roll music was concentrated: Chicago, Cincinnati, Memphis, New Orleans, Los Angeles and to a lesser extent the New Jersey/New York area. Chicago became home to the immigrant musicians from the Mississippi Delta region. Known collectively as the "Delta Bluesmen," this group included Howlin' Wolf, Bo Diddley, Muddy Waters and the incomparable Chuck Berry. Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf have been given credit for "electrifying the blues," the first blues musicians to trade the acoustic for the electric guitar, which was necessary so that the musicians could hear themselves play over the noisy crowds in the Chicago taverns where they played. Their legacy in the history of rock and roll is well known. The Rolling Stones took their name from a Muddy Waters tune, and the "Bo Diddley Beat," a beat that borrowed from Afro-Cuban techniques was copied far and wide in rock and roll, perhaps most famously by Buddy Holly. And then there's Chuck Berry, the true king of rock and roll. All these musicians recorded for Chess records, which was one of the key independent record labels of that era.

In Cincinnati, there was King Records, owned by Syd Nathan. The King roster was the most unique among the indie labels of the 1940s and 1950s because it was the most racially integrated, and Nathan encouraged his artists – black and white - to aim for cross over appeal. Of course, Nathan was trying to make as much money as possible; that's why he encouraged his black artists to cover country western tunes, and his white artists to record rhythm and blues music. Nathan figured that a white recording artist who recorded country music might not sell well in the black community, but maybe a black artist covering the same music would do well, and vice versa. Nathan's desire to capture more of the market, inadvertently contributed to the interracial nature of rock and roll music. King's most important recording artist was the aforementioned Wynonie

Harris, who more than anyone else has a legitimate claim to being the first rock and roll recording artist.

In the wide-open, anything-goes Los Angeles, scores of indie labels popped up in the forties, the most important of which were Aladdin, Specialty and Imperial. Imperial recorded Fats Domino, Shirley and Lee recorded for Aladdin, and Specialty Records broke Little Richard. The indies from LA, like Aladdin and Imperial recorded many of their sessions in New Orleans, including Fats Domino.

Sun records in Memphis broke Elvis, Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis and Johnny Cash in the mid 1950s, but Sam Phillips also recorded many of the Delta Blues musicians, including B.B. King and Howlin' Wolf in the early 1950s before Elvis and his cohort. The regional challenge that rock and roll posed to the Tin Pan Alley media centers of New York and LA reached a peak by the mid 1950s.

As a result of the success of sales for jukeboxes and domestic consumers, the genre rock n roll jumped from 15.7 percent of the market in 1955 to 42.7 percent in 1959[271]. As a result of the popularity of rock n roll, sales industry wide grew from $213 million in 1954 to $603 million by 1959. Again, most of these records were produced by the independent labels on the periphery of the music industry in regional areas outside the media centers dominated by Tin Pan Alley and Hollywood. From 1948 to 1955, the number of firms (as opposed to labels, since many labels can by owned by single firm) that posted hits in the top ten ranged from four to seven. But from '56 to '59 the number of firms recording top 10 hits rose to 29. For a brief time span, the majors lost half of their market share for popular music[272]. The major record labels were still churning out pop tunes with the Tin Pan Alley sound, tunes that targeted the white middle class. Popular songs produced by the major record labels from that era included, Perry Como's "No Other Love," Percy Faith's "Song from Moulin Rouge," Les Baxter's "April in Portugal," and "How Much is that Doggie in the Window," by Patti Page. The lyrics to doggie in the window go,

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[271] See Reebee Garofalo, *Rockin' Out* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1997) page152.

> How much is that doggie in the window? *(arf! arf!)*
> The one with the waggley tail
> How much is that doggie in the window? *(arf! arf!)*
> I do hope that doggie's for sale
> I must take a trip to California
> And leave my poor sweetheart alone
> If he has a dog, he won't be lonesome
> And the doggie will have a good home[273]

While rhythm and blues and rock and roll artists were embracing the Dionysian ethos of working class pretensions, which including drinking, sex and confrontations with the police, Patti Page, the poster girl for white, middle class America and Tin Pan Alley exclaimed, "Arf! Arf! Goes the little doggie!" Cute little doggies indeed, no wonder the majors lost half the market for recorded music.

When rock and roll blew up in the mid 1950s, members of Broadcast Music Incorporated (BMI), which was formed by the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) in 1940, published most of the new songs. NAB created BMI as a company union of sorts, since its *raison d'etre,* was the destruction of ASCAP. When NAB was involved with contract negotiations in the late 1930s with ASCAP, they were hoping to get

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[272] See Peterson and Berger, "Cycles in Symbol Production," in *On Record*, edited by Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (New York and London, Routledge, 1990)

[273] "How Much is that Doggie in the Window," performed by Patti Page, appears on *20th Century Masters: The Best of Patti Page* (Nashville Mercury 2003).

ASCAP to lower their licensing fees for use of their copyrighted music. When ASCAP refused, NAB formed BMI in an attempt to break ASCAP. Eventually ASCAP and NAB came to a compromise with government prodding, but the creation of BMI gave NAB significant leverage in negotiations with ASCAP in years to come. Since ASCAP refused membership to authors of rhythm and blues songs, most R&/B and later rock and roll composers signed up with BMI. At first BMI did not represent a challenge, because BMI songs were limited to the periphery of the industry in working class jukebox joints, and regional radio stations that had rhythm and blues programming content. When rock and roll took half the market in the 1950s, BMI became a major powerhouse that challenged ASCAP's monopoly on licensed music for use in broadcast. ASCAP responded to BMI's challenged in 1958, when ASCAP lobbied Congress to investigate the so-called conspiracy between rock and roll music and the practice of payola, which was industry slang for bribing disc jockeys to play records. The claim by ASCAP was that payola had created rock and roll, because without being bribed, disc jockeys would have no incentive to play music as "awful" as rock and roll. Of course, nobody was able to prove that rock and roll was the product of payola during the course of the Congressional proceedings, but ASCAP's desperate attempt to get Congress to help them rid the country of rock and roll demonstrated their fear of BMI's growing power in the industry. Once it became clear that rock and roll was not going away the major record labels developed strategies to get control over the business end of the new music.

The majors responded to the competition at first by covering rock and roll tunes from independent labels by using artists from their own rosters. Management at the major record labels were still firmly embedded in white middle class cultural sensibilities, and they figured that they could recapture the market for records without offending their traditional white middle class consumer base if they offered cover versions of rock and roll tunes by clean-cut middle class white boys like Pat Boone. Boone covered everything out there in the mid 1950s, including hits by Little Richard, Fats Domino and Jerry Lee Lewis, three figures that were way too controversial to be on the roster of major record labels. The majors figured, wrongly, that they could hold together their traditional middle class base and capture the working class rock and roll audience, by offering a clean-cut, sanitized version of rock and roll that both changed the lyrics of the songs, and the color and class of the performers, so as not offend middle America.

The attempt to keep the “essence” of rock and roll music, while cleaning up the lyrics, removing Elvis’ gyrating pelvis, and erasing the image of black performers altogether, failed miserably. Unfortunately for the major record labels, consumers of rock and roll music were not found of fake rock and roll; on the contrary, they preferred the real deal. Authentic, “wild” rock and roll with all the gyrating pelvis,’ screaming singers, hair flying this way and that, black and white kids mixing at shows; all that stuff was way more fun than boring, straight-laced, clean-cut Ivy League crooners like Pat Boone. The strategy of covering tanked big time.

The majors did, however, get help in other areas that proved fortuitous in their attempt to recapture the market for recorded music and rid the world of rock and roll. In the span of a few years, Elvis Presley enlisted in the military, Chuck Berry went to jail for transporting a “minor” across state lines, Little Richard left rock and roll to become a Baptist minister, Jerry Lee Lewis was ostracized for marrying his 13 year-old cousin, and

Buddy Holly, Richie Valens and the Big Bopper died together in a plane crash. Suddenly, all the threatening, working class figures in rock and roll were gone or dead. It seemed very possible to the establishment in the music industry that the “fad” of rock and roll ended with the end of the careers of the biggest rock and roll stars. The majors also got help from Congress during the Payola hearings, as Senators, music professors and movie stars all used the public forum to lash out against the “depravity” of rock and roll. Disc Jockey Alan Freed, the voice of rock and roll, was the principle fall guy in the aftermath of the Payola hearings, and his forced retirement from radio, and his death soon thereafter, was a big blow for the independent spirit of grassroots working class rock and roll music.

Between 1958, the end of the Payola hearings, and 1964, the year the Beatles arrived, the core interests in the music industry were able to fold rock and roll back into mainstream middle class America values and back into the status quo of business operations. In short, after 1958, rock and roll was “Tin Palleyized.” Sometimes referred to as “schlock rock,” the period of rock and roll from 1958 to 1964 was represented by tunes from Neal Sedaka, Carol King and others who worked in the Brill building located at the intersection of Broadway and 49th Street in New York City. The “safe,” “clean” music of Sedaka, King and others was also referred to as “bubble gum” rock and it signaled Tin Pan Alley’s temporary conquest of rock and roll. The singers who performed and recorded the bubble gum “schlock rock,” were also cast in the clean-cut, white, middle class image. According to Reebee Garofalo, “in a few short years, rock’n’roll had degenerated form Sam Phillip’s dream of a white man who could sing black to a white high-school kid who couldn’t sing at all[274].” The kid who Garofalo refers to was Fabian, the “rock and roll” singer created by the masterminds of “schlock.”

It was after 1959, that the majors tried to turn rock and roll into an innocuous teenage phenomenon. Rock and roll was never exclusively a teenage phenomenon, as I have demonstrated in previous chapters, but when the corporate machine tried to sanitize rock and roll to turn a profit on it, they found that the best strategy for capturing rock and roll was to turn it into a manufactured, faux teen culture. In short, corporate schlock rock was marketed as harmless, white, middle class fun for suburban teenagers, which is why most of the songs are vacuous tunes about such serious things as “puppy love.” Some of the big hits of the “schlock rock” era were Paul Anka’s “Put Your Head on My Shoulder,” and “Puppy Love,” Frankie Avalon’s “Ginger Bread,” and “Bobby Sox to Stockings,” and Neil Sedaka’s “Breaking Up is Hard to Do,” and “Calendar Girl.” The late fifties, early sixties era of the Brill building song factory in New York was the second coming of Tin Pan Alley, and it seemed like the rock and roll challenge had been defeated, and the division of labor as well as the ownership patterns of the music industry would return to the status quo of core and periphery. It didn’t last, however, thanks to the British invasion of rock and roll during the mid 1960s that blew up the culture and the structure of the American music industry.

The British invasion blew schlock rock to smithereens, ending the second wave of Tin Pan Alley dominance, as the songwriters from the Brill building were literally put out of business by two working class kids from Liverpool, John Lennon and Paul McCartney. The Beatles, and their cohort, including the Rolling Stones, the Kinks and the Who returned the working class culture of pretension to America with their brand of in your face rock and roll. They also represented a new threat to the economic structure of the music industry. The rock musicians of the British invasion were serious connoisseurs of American blues, rhythm and blues and hillbilly music, and their energy and passion for rock and roll rivaled the pretensions of Wynonie Harris, Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Elvis and Jerry Lee Lewis. In fact, the Beatles' first album, which was recorded and produced by the black owned label Vee Jay, was a collection of cover songs, which included covers of Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis and Chuck Berry. After that first album, however, the Beatles wrote all of their own material. John and Paul wrote most of the Beatles songs in the Beatles archive, but George Harrison wrote some big hits as well.

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[274] Garofalo (1997), p. 161.

The fact that the Beatles wrote all of their own songs was one of the key developments in the transformation of the division of labor in the music recording industry. In the early 1950s, most, if not all, of the early rock and roll recording stars, recorded other people's music, which was the traditional way of doing things. Since the turn of the century, song writing had been separate from song and music performance in the division of labor in the music industry. Tin Pan Alley songwriters would supply songs and music to singers and instrumentalists, who would in turn perform the music. By the 1940s, all aspects of commercial music making were housed under one roof, including song writing, song publishing, recording, manufacturing, and distribution; all of these tasks took place at the major record label, and songwriting was kept separate from song performing in the "Fordist" division of labor that prevailed at that time. Also in the 1940s the major record labels had supplanted the publishers of Tin Pan Alley as the controlling establishment in the music industry.

While the Beatles and the British invasion musicians represented a key turning point in the transformation of the structure of the music industry in the sixties, there were very important exceptions from the fifties, like Chuck Berry, who also wrote all of his own songs. Chuck Berry was one of the few rock and roll musicians who wrote all of his own material. Buddy Holly was another important figure in this regard. In fact, if it wasn't for Berry's arrest and conviction, which stifled his career, he would have played a greater role in the changing division of labor in the recording industry, and Buddy Holly too, if it were not for his untimely death, would have had a larger impact on the transformation of the division of labor in music recording. As it turned out, that role would fall on the Beatles and the British invasion musicians, as well as Bob Dylan and the Beach Boys in the United States. As important as Dylan and the Beach Boys were to the culture of rock and roll, it was the Beatles who had the biggest impact on the structure of the recording industry. What made the Beatles and their British cohort key figures in the transformation of the division of labor is that their music, indeed their entire generation's culture was foreign to the Artists and Repertoire (A&R) departments at the major record labels in the United States. For that reason, The Who's hit tune "My Generation," had just as profound *structural* effects on the music industry as much as cultural effects for their peers. Since most of the A & R employees at the major record labels still had an ear for middle class Tin Pan Alley music - like Patti Page's recording of "How Much is that Little Doggie" Arf! Arf! - the reemergence of radical working class rock and roll with the British Invasion caught A & R departments completely by surprise.

Traditionally, A&R folk at the major labels were responsible for finding and signing new talent in order to maintain a solid roster of talented performers at the label.

Rock and roll music, however, exceeded the expertise of most A&R people in the core of the music industry, even after the shock waves of 1950s rock and roll. Most A&R people in the mid 1960s figured that the schlock rock of the Brill building had returned things to the status quo after the threat of fifties rock and roll died with the end of the careers of the most outrageous recording stars. In fact, everyone working at the major record labels thought that the "greasy dishwasher" and "stupid sharecropper" brand of rock and roll was finally killed off in 1958 after the Payola hearings. When it became clear that they were wrong about that, management at the record labels had to come up with a new strategy to try and contain rock and roll the second time around after 1964. Since the strategy of covering rock and roll songs was a failure the first time around, the majors decided not to try and reproduce the Beatles with fake versions of the fab four. It was understood that they could not imitate the British invasion musicians.

Instead, the majors decided to *outsource* the production of rock and roll records altogether, leaving the creative side of things to the independent producers, who were the other key figures of the transformation of the division of labor. George Martin, for example was the Beatles' producer, and he played a crucial role in the success of the Beatles studio, concept albums like *Sgt. Pepper's.* Why try and make a kind of music you nothing about, if you can make money off of it on the distribution end? That was the rhetorical question posed by the major record labels on the 1960s. When the major record labels formed agreements with independent producers, they "downsized" their staff of A&R people, who were more or less worthless when it came to rock and roll.

Spinning off the work of A&R to independent producers was the first stage of outsourcing production, and downsizing staff, since the independent producer essentially performed the role of subcontractor for the major record label. These were the necessary, but not sufficient conditions for the transformation to a post-Fordist structural paradigm in the recording industry that displaced the musicians' union from the core of the music industry. The transformation of the division of labor was combined with novel ownership patterns, which taken together with the outsourcing of production was the one two punch that restructured the music business.

The second strategy the major record labels used in response to rock and roll, after the failure of covering, was the buyout. Many major labels began to absorb the successful independent labels in a wave of consolidation beginning in the 1960s. The number firms recording singles in Billboard's Top 100 dropped from a high of 40 firms in 1960 to just 20 by 1971. Thus, while many different *label names* appeared on the charts, these multiple labels were owned by a small number of *firms*. More and more so-called independent record labels were actually owned by a major record label, becoming subsidiaries in huge corporate conglomerates. The practice of buying out independent labels, or merging several independent labels into a corporate subsidiary was combined with the outsourcing of creative labor to independent producers and the songwriters of the rock bands themselves. This combination had a dramatic effect on the division of labor in the recording industry, restructuring it a way that resulted in production being spun off from the corporate parent label entirely. All the aspects of production were eventually spun off: songwriting, recording sessions, and pressing discs. The period beginning in the mid-sixties was the first wave of consolidation and mergers of labels ending with mega mergers like the merger of Warner Bros., Elektra and Atlantic into WEA distribution in the early 70's. The creation of WEA distribution was a watershed in the music recording industry, because it signaled a profound shift in focus on the part of the major record labels from production to distribution of records.

Since the staff of personnel at the major record labels knew next to nothing about rock and roll, they turned their attention to distribution, and left the production end to either a subsidiary label, or a label they partially owned, or a label they did not own, but distributed. The last example would become a more common practice in the 1970's. While the Beatles were on a major record label – Capitol – that did sign a labor contract with the musicians' union, in the years to come, more and more independent producers would set up their own recording studios, and their own record labels, which signaled the knock out blow to the musicians' union since most of these so-called independent labels in the late sixties and early seventies did not sign a contract with the union. Because the musicians' union had been deriding rock and roll for nearly two decades, they were mostly shut out of the production of rock and roll music by the early 1970's. It's true that most rock and roll musicians who signed with a major record label in the early seventies were still members of the union, *de facto*, since the majors still held recording contracts with the AFM; nonetheless, the union's cultural ignorance of rock and roll, and their refusal to actively organize rock and roll musicians for so long would eventually translate into structural changes that marginalized the union, because as more labels once again became independently owned as the majors retreated to distribution rather than production, more and more independent record labels became independent *non-union* subcontractors. The independent producer and rock bands that wrote their own material were the pivot point upon which the entire structure of the recording shifted to a post-

Fordist pattern characterized by dispersed production and centralized distribution. (See the appendix section at the end of this chapter).

As the merger movement continued through the 1970's and 1980's, other important mergers included the acquisition of Mercury and Island Records by Polygram, and RCA's purchase A & M records, and United Artists merger with Capitol. RCA moved on indie labels again in 1983 when it added Arista and Ariola to its list of subsidiaries. CBS and MCA were also busy in 1983. CBS bought an interest in Chrysalis records, and MCA bought the giant of indies, Motown records. The second wave of consolidation began in the late 1980's, as the multinational conglomerates like SONY (Japan), The Seagram Company (Canada), Bertelsmann AG(Germany) and Time Warner took control of the music recording industry. SONY acquired CBS records and its labels for $2 billion in 1988, Geffen was purchased by MCA for $550 million in 1990, Virgin was bought for $872 million by EMI and BMG acquired Arista and RCA in 1993. The biggest merger to date was the 1998 marriage of Polygram and MCA records under the umbrella of the Seagram Company. Today, all the music groups owned by corporate conglomerates rake in billions of dollars in revenue each year. Universal Music Group (UMG), which is now owned by the French conglomerate Vivendi/Universal, was the first corporate owned music company to make a billion dollars in *profit*.

As the majors began, in the late sixties and early seventies, to focus more on distribution arrangements rather than production variables, they developed a new so-called "open," or "flexible" system of production that replaced the older "closed" system of production that had protected and benefited the musicians' union. The majors began to disperse the recording process among various subsidiaries and increased the number of distribution agreements with labels in their outer orbits, labels they did not own outright. While production was more dispersed beginning in the mid 1960s, than in the forties or fifties, the production companies were still identical with subsidiary labels owned by the majors. In other words, the majors had yet to subcontract production to separate companies that were not owned outright by the parent company. A subsidiary of RCA, like Arista for example, will use the services of independent producers, but the production of the sound recording remains a product of the Arista label, which means that the parent company and subsidiary are obliged to honor the terms of the labor contract with the AFM. In the second wave of mergers, however, the majors changed their strategy of wholly purchasing labels to a new strategy of partial purchase, joint venture or distribution deal. The more recent trend of joint ventures began in the early 1970's and it represents the maturation of the post-Fordist model, because the production of the sound recording is farmed out to companies partially owned or not owned at all. It is the dominant model today, and it reveals that the majors exercise control over the music industry via distribution not production.

The shift to a post-Fordist, post-industrial form of production is the hallmark of the so-called "new economy" which, depending on how you date it, emerged somewhere around the early 1970's. Post-industrialism refers to the decline of the manufacturing sectors of the U.S. economy. Less and less material goods are produced here in the U.S. as companies search for cheaper labor across the border. But dispersed production occurs within the U.S. also, as companies move from the North to the South where labor costs are cheaper due to the low rates of unionization among workers in the Southern states. Post-industrialism also refers to a declining commitment by the Federal government to support unions and workers' rights. Since the Reagan administration, the government has abandoned the idea that unions are necessary partners in the quest for industrial stability and amicable labor relations among employers and employees. Post-Fordism refers to the vertical disintegration of corporations and market specialization. The days of mass production and mass consumption in the United States are over. Henry Ford's idea of centralized production, and wage led economic growth, no longer has the same kind of influence over economists and policy makers that it once did. Unlike in the Fordist model, where unions are seen as vital to the economy because they raise wage levels and increase the purchasing power of consumers, and therefore boost aggregate demand, unions today are viewed as a drag on the economy. In both cases, the "new" economy does not bode well for unionized workers, and workers in general, including professional musicians. Of course, there are good reasons to challenge the backlash of conservatism that has come to dominate economic "wisdom." Many economists believe we need to return to an industrial, Fordist model to revive the economy. In the music recording industry, sales are not down as much as in other industries, but for the workers in the music recording industry, (the professional musicians), the shift to a post-industrial, post-Fordist pattern of production is bad for them, just the same as it's bad for workers in other industries. The post-Fordist model almost invariably translates into poorer working conditions and less pay for professional musicians[275].

In short, the majors are using the indies as subcontractors to cut back on production costs, principally labor costs, a strategy that mimics a wide spread pattern of farming out production that cuts across almost every industry in the United States. Just as is the case in other industries, most of the subcontracting companies in the recording industry use non-union workers, in this case, musicians, and just as in other industries, subcontracting companies in the recording industry do not honor terms and conditions required by the union's labor contract, which is held by the larger, contracting company. When a record company sign*s* a labor agreement, or labor contract with the musician's union, it is referred to as a "signatory" company. The AFM has three contracts with the major record labels in the recording industry that it uses to regulate wages and working conditions throughout the industry. The first contract is the Phonograph Record Labor Agreement, which regulates wage scales and health and pension funds for AFM members. The other two contracts are the Phonograph Record Trust Agreement and the Special Payments Fund, two agreements that raise monies to be used for free public concerts and for AFM members in the recording industry[276]. Union companies, then, are signatory companies, but in the words of a well-known lawyer in the recording industry, "all of the majors are signatories, whereas most independent record companies are not[277]." As the market share of the indie labels increases as a result of major label outsourcing of production, the number of non-signatory labels rises in proportion to the signatory ones. The irony, then, is that the indies, a collective of labels usually viewed as the leaders of an anti-establishment ethos, are, in many cases, firmly embedded in the establishment, as silent partners in the corporate assault on union labor, in this case the musician's union. I've calculated, very conservatively, that non-union shops produce at least 40% of the market for CD's[278].

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[275] For more on post-Fordism, see Michel Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation* (Verso, 1979), Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream*, (Verso, 1984) and Ash Amin, *Post-Fordism* (Blackwell, 1994).

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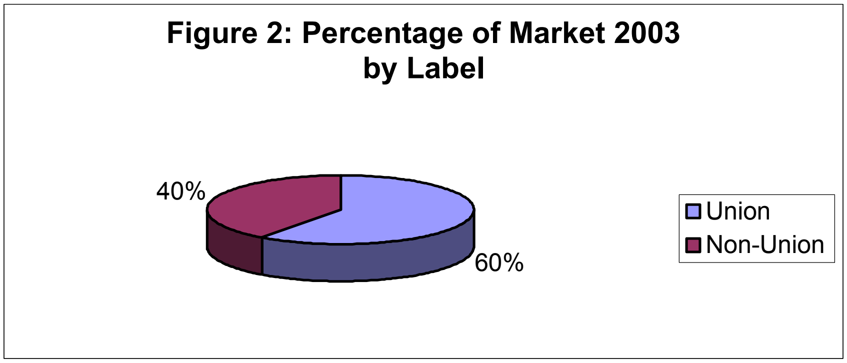
[276] I describe the function and history of these funds below.

[277] The term "signatory" refers to a record company that signs a labor agreement with the musicians' union, the American Federation of Musicians. All of the Major record labels have signed labor agreements, or contracts, with the AFM, and as such, they are referred to as signatory labels. The quote above is from Lawrence J. Blake, and can be found in *The Musician's Business and Legal Guide*, compiled and edited by Mark Holloran, Esq. (Printice-Hall, NJ 1996).



The novel production arrangements and outsourcing arrangements in the recording industry that I describe in detail below, undermines the AFM, by allowing the major record companies to *avoid* the terms of the Phonograph Record Labor Agreement, the Phonograph Record Trust Agreement, and the Special Payments Fund Agreement[279]. The AFM contracts protect both royalty musicians (those who earn money from a small percentage of record sales) and session musicians, (the musicians who make a living playing as "extras" in the recording studios). In addition to creating the conditions for the erosion or reduction of pay scales for professional musicians, the increasing use of the indies by the majors is draining money from two of the union's funds, the Music

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[278] Exact figures on the percentage of the market that represents CD's recorded by non-union record labels is almost impossible to calculate because of the myriad of relationships between the gigantic number of record labels, and the rapid turnover of company ownership. My calculations are based on data from *Billboard* magazine. I tallied data from the "biggest" and most successful independent labels that did not hold a contract with the union, including the labels owned by *Zomba*, *Tommy Boy*, *No Limit Records*, as well as labels distributed by independent distribution companies partly owned by a major record label, including "big name" indie labels like *Epithet*.

[279] We describe the function and history of the two funds below.

Performance Trust Fund and the Special Payments Fund[280]. Union avoidance is possible and legal, because according to U.S. labor law, if a corporation that holds a labor contract with one or more unions outsources, or transfers some of its operations to another company, it is not legally obligated to ensure that the other, usually smaller company enforces the conditions and terms of the labor contract that it, itself holds with the union, or unions. U.S. labor law even allows for a union signatory company to own as much as 50% of another company before it is obligated to ensure that its subsidiary honors the terms of any labor agreement it may have with any number of unions[281]. In short, corporations are not responsible for the working conditions at companies they use as subcontractors, unless the own at least 51% of the subcontracting company. For example, the major record label *Atlantic records* owns 25% of the indie label, *Mammoth records*, but *Atlantic* is not legally bound to apply the rules of the labor contract it signed with the musicians' union to the musicians that record for *Mammoth*, because *Atlantic* records is not considered the employer, even though *Atlantic* owns part of *Mammoth* and makes money off of the labor performed by musicians signed to the *Mammoth* label. *Atlantic* and *Mammoth* also share management personnel, and *Mammoth* uses *Atlantic* for manufacturing and distribution, but the rules contained in the AFM Recording Agreement do not apply to *Mammoth* record artists. The staff at *Mammoth* records performs the functions of finding and signing recording artists, developing their material and recording their music. *Atlantic* records takes over with pressing, marketing and distributing the records. This is just one of many types of outsourcing arrangements between major record labels and independent record labels. See figure 3 below.

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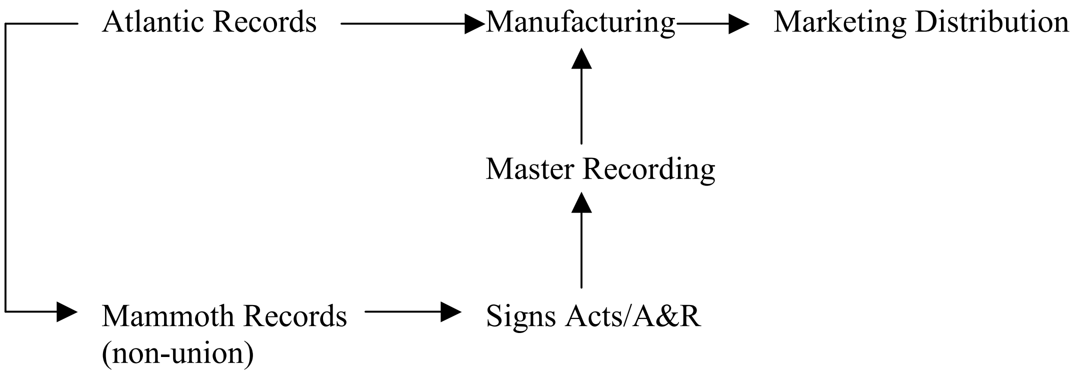
[280] I explain the function and history of the funds in more detail below.

[281] These conditions were first written into law with the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947.

Figure 3: example of outsourcing in the music industry.



The arrangement between *Atlantic* and *Mammoth* allows *Atlantic* to completely side step the musicians' union. *Atlantic* is a union shop, but since it is not legally defined as the employer of the non-union shop at *Mammoth* records, the labor contract with the musicians' union is meaningless. In other industries, it's clear that corporate subcontracting and outsourcing is an assault on organized, union labor, but in the record industry it is more difficult to see because not only is it difficult to find out just how indie labels are connected to the majors, but also because the collective representation of the indies as anti-establishment blurs their role as non-union subcontractors. Flow and pie charts in the appendix to this dissertation help make sense of the complicated structure of the industry.

In sum, the first phase of the transition to a post-Fordist model of production began in the 1960s as the major labels began to use independent producers and independent recording studios to produce their sound recordings. In the earlier decades, the recording studios, and the creative process as a whole, was controlled by the major labels, and the producers and sound engineers, along with the musicians, were employed by the major label. But after the explosion of rock n roll, the production process was transformed and by the late sixties and early 1970's, the major record labels contracted out the creative aspects of record making to focus on the manufacture, distribution and sale of records. Joe Smith, president of Warner Reprise records in the early 1970's summed up the new structure of the industry: "The mechanics of a record company," he said, "are just that – mechanics[282]." Smith and other management executives at the majors realized that it was a good business decision to get out of the creative side of music, and focus only on the business side, or the bottom line, and the best way to do that was to focus on monopolizing the distribution end of the industry.

It took a few decades for the structural repercussions of rejecting rock and roll to take effect, but the musicians' union's elitist attitude toward rock and roll turned out to be a huge mistake in economic terms, because while the culture of the AFM remained the culture of jazz and classical music, in the market for recorded music, jazz and classical music combined accounted for less than 10% of the market by 1970. The union has suffered from declining revenues in lost record sales and from declining membership. Beyond making a big mistake by acting against their own economic interests, the musicians' union also betrayed the entire working class to some extent, by ridiculing their music and ultimately their culture in general. Lastly, the musicians' union was part of a labor movement that increasingly alienated young people in the 1960s, people who came to see labor unions as part of the problem instead of part of the solution. It's remarkable how drastically things changed for the musicians' union between 1940 and 1970, but the self-inflicted demise of the musicians' union has spread negative effects far and wide. The radical change in imagination that allowed workers to see beyond scarcity in a world where technology was the tide that lifted all boats, would ultimately be spoiled by the very agents that brought it about in the first place: the labor unions in general and the musicians' union in particular. We live now in a culture of austerity imposed on us by the ruling class in America, a culture, which ironically was partly created by a labor movement that was unable to find ways to connect with the cultural radicalism of the 1960s, of which rock and roll was the primary vehicle. Below I show some specific cases where the musicians' union faces some serious challenges that must be overcome if it is going to turn things around. I also end the epilogue with a discussion of some reasons why there is still hope for the musicians' union.

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[282] See Garofalo and Chapple, *Rock n Roll is Here to Pay*, page 175.

EPILOGUE: THE SITUATION TODAY

"It's a lowdown dirty, dirty shame."

-- Louis Jordan

The structural implications of the musicians' union's dismissal of rock and roll in the 1950s and 1960s is evident in the situation today, where roughly half of the market for music today is produced in non-union shops, and increasingly live venues like taverns no longer even pay musicians, who are lucky if they get free drinks in exchange for their labor. When the Doors played the Whiskey a Go Go in 1966, it was a good gig for them, because in addition to the exposure they received from playing there, the made good money. That night they made a few hundred dollars each time they played, which for 1966 was good money for a local band that had yet to go big. They made that much that night because they were accidental members of the musicians' union. The Whiskey a Go Go, one of the most famous clubs in Los Angeles was a union shop that was first organized by the musicians' union in the early 1960s when the club opened its doors for the first time. But now, the situation for musicians playing at small venues like the Whiskey is radically different. In countless mid size and small venues across the country, musicians no longer make union scale – the wage rate set by the union - because the AFM no longer has the clout to organize small to mid-size live venues. In its heyday, the musicians' union could claim nearly all of the venues of a big city like Manhattan as union shops, no matter what their size, small and large alike. Indeed in most big cities in the U.S. from the turn of the century until the 1960s, the musicians' union had a stake in the venues for live music. Today, musicians playing in small clubs, bars, or in some cases hotels, they are lucky to get a share of the take from admissions charged at the door, or as is more often the case, they'll get free drinks, but *no* money for their labor. The radical change in the fortunes of musicians who play live gigs at small and mid sized venues is the result, in part, of the musicians' union neglecting to organize newer generations of musicians, beginning with rock and roll musicians in the early '50's. It's a remarkable turn of events from a few decades ago when the musicians' union could claim most live venues in urban areas as closed shops, and when almost every record made in America was on a union label. Consider the situation in the music recording industry today.

Today, unlike a few decades ago, where the majors competed directly with the independent labels, and absorbed them when they became successful, the majors "cooperate," so to speak, with the "independent" labels, and rather than buy them out, the majors pursue "joint-ventures," or equity deals, partial ownership and distribution deals with independent labels[283]. These kinds of arrangements typically indicate union avoidance on the part of the major record labels. Interestingly, most of the equity deals are structured so that the major owns less than half of the indie label, which means that legally the major is not considered the employer. Similarly, if a major label *distributes* a non-union, non-signatory label, it is not required to enforce the terms of the Phonograph Record Labor Agreement, which is the contract that all of the major record labels have signed. In the past few decades, as the majors were absorbed into huge multinational corporations with tens of billions of dollars of revenue each, like SONY, The Seagram Company, Bertelsmann AG, EMI Group PLC, and Time Warner (see the diagrams at the end of this chapter in the appendix section), they simultaneously developed novel production and distribution arrangements with a growing number of “independent” labels, labels that were garnering increasing shares of the market due to the popularity of rap/hip-hop and alternative rock. There was, in short, a concentration of power in the music industry at the top, through corporate mergers and increasing control over distribution, while at the bottom there developed novel relationships with indie labels that signaled a kind of vertical disintegration and dispersion of production.

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[283] *The Global Jukebox*, by Robert Burnett, Paul Lopes, "Innovation and Diversity in the Popular Music Industry, 1969-1990," *American Sociological Review*, 57, and Richard A. Peterson and David G. Berger "Cycles in Symbol Production: The Case of Popular Music," in *On Record,* edited by Simon Frith.

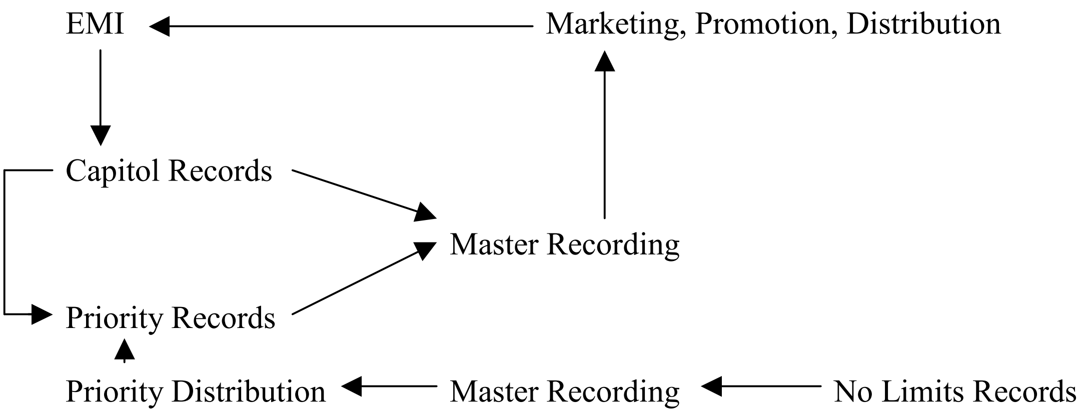
The main questions for the AFM are how much of the market share represented by the relationships between the major and “independent” record companies is non-union? How many of the successful indies are non-signatory labels, and what is their connection to the majors? How much money is the union losing to the Special Payments Fund as a result of the growing market share of non-signatory labels? How many musicians are working at these indies for wages under scale set by the AFM?

In the language of music attorneys, the novel arrangements are broken down into six kinds of deals: (a) Pressing and Distribution or P&D deals, (b) distribution only deals, (c) fulfillment deals, (d) production deals (e) joint ventures, and (f) equity deals. All of these arrangements represent a turn toward a post-Fordist model in the music recording industry. In a pressing and distribution deal, the indie label will produce a sound recording on a master tape – or, as is more often these days a master recording in digital format - and give the master to a major label company to manufacture and distribute the album. In a typical P&D arrangement, the major charges a fee like 30% of wholesale price on a CD, which is around $11. Pressing and distribution deals used to be the most common kinds of deals between indies and majors, but today joint ventures are more popular because they are more profitable for the major label. In a distribution only deal, the independent label manufactures the CD, and the Major label merely distributes it at a slightly lower fee than the P&D fee. A fulfillment is where the major presses and manufactures the CD, but sends it to independent distributors, rather than send it through its own distribution network. In a production deal, a production company (a label) will sign an artist or band to their company at a fixed royalty rate. The company will then turn around and sign a royalty deal – at a higher rate - with a major record company to manufacture and distribute the CD. In these deals, the major, not the indie owns the master tape of the sound recording. Joint ventures are basically profit sharing arrangements. In a typical joint venture, the major label fronts the money for all production costs, and the two labels share all the profits. In most joint ventures, the major label will deduct 35% of the independent's gross income to cover production and distribution costs. In an equity deal, the major actually buys an interest, partial or whole, in the independent company. In these arrangements, the major actually owns stock in the indie company, unlike distribution deals where the major only has the rights to sell the indie records.

To put all of this in different terms, there are five types of arrangements between majors and indies that represent a kind of post-Fordist pattern that threatens to undermine the presence of union musicians through increasing sales of non-union, or non-signatory records. First, the major label will create a spin-off label and send it through both the major and independent distribution networks, with the new label referring to itself as an indie, even though the imprint label is entirely owned by the major. Sony's new label "550" (Celine Dion) is an example. In most of these cases, the spin-off, or imprint is a signatory, or union label and remains true to guidelines established by the AFM's labor contract. Second, a major label will buy part or half of an already existing successful indie label but without sending the records through the major distribution channels, but rather exclusively through independent distribution networks. Warner Bros. 50% purchase of Tommy Boy (Coolio, De La Soul) is an example of this kind of arrangement, known as an "equity deal." Warner Bros. owns half of Tommy Boy, but none of Tommy Boy's records are distributed by WEA distribution, which is Warner's distribution company. Instead, independent distributors distribute Tommy Boy's records. For that reason, Tommy Boy is considered by the industry to be an "independent" record company. The third arrangement is a different kind of equity deal, where a major will buy half or part of an indie and send the records through the major distribution network. The relationship between BMG and Zomba (Backstreet Boys, 'N Sync, Britney Spears, R. Kelly, Tribe Called Quest, Mystikal, Too Short, KRS-ONE) fits this model. Another even more complicated example of this arrangement is the relationship between Capitol Records, a major label owned by the corporate conglomerate EMI, Priority Records, an independent label half owned by Capitol, and No Limits Records, an independent label distributed by Priority Records. In this case, Priority Records, a non-union company half owned by Capitol - which is a union shop – uses Capitol Records to distribute its records. Furthermore, Priority has its own distribution company that distributes other non-union products, like records produced at the non-signatory indie label, No Limit Records. No

Limit Records is a non-union employer, yet it benefits from the capital and resources that flow all the way down from EMI, which is a union employer. See figure 4 below.

Figure 4.


EMI
Marketing, Promotion, Distribution
Capitol Records
Master Recording
Priority Records
Priority Distribution
Master Recording
No Limits Records

In the diagram above, ownership flows down from EMI to Priority, while distribution flows up from No Limit Records to Priority Records, while Priority makes use of EMI resources for distribution of its records. So even thought No Limit Records clearly benefits from the resources it enjoys indirectly from EMI, and while there is a clear connection between the two companies, EMI is not legally obligated to ensure that No Limit Records adhere to the musicians' union's labor contract. Nor is EMI in any way obligated to look after the employees of Priority Records even though it owns a significant stake in Priority. Both cases represent union avoidance via outsourcing of production.

Fourth, a major label will purchase all or half of an existing independent *distribution* company to get access to the indie marketplace, through the smaller retail outlets. Sony's purchase of RED distribution, EMD's interest in Caroline Distribution and Warner's partial purchase of ADA distribution serve as examples of this trend. Major record labels get a piece of the profit from these independent distribution companies that distribute non-union labels almost exclusively. Fifth, a major will launch it's own "indie" distribution arm rather than make an equity deal with an already existing distribution company. Some of these kinds of deals listed above are referred to as "joint ventures," a growing trend in the industry. In the last three cases the majors end up distributing a significant number of non-signatory labels.

It is a confusing landscape to map, because a label, by definition, is considered an "independent" label if it is *distributed* through independent networks rather than by the majors. A label can be partially owned by a major, and get the larger amounts of capital investment, but still be considered an indie if it isn't distributed the major. Tommy Boy is a good example. In this case, the successful hip-hop label, even though it's half owned by Warner, is considered an "independent" label. One the other hand, a label that is independently owned may not be considered an indie if it goes through the majors distribution network. Such is the case with Zomba and its imprints. Add to this the fact that some "independent" distribution companies are now partially owned by the majors, and you get a complicated arrangement[284]. That the distinction between indie and major is based on distribution says much about how significantly the industry has changed, how it has take a post-Fordist, post-industrial form. The music recording industry is controlled by the entities that control distribution, not production.

The year 1996 was, according to *Billboard* Magazine, a significant year for the recording industry because, for the first time in almost five decades, the independent labels, taken collectively, held the number one spot for total market percentage of recordings. This figure is significant in that in comes after two waves of industry consolidation that produced the "majors" that we have today. In 1996, the indies held

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[284] See *Billboard* magazine, May 22, 1999 and March 26, 1994.

21.2% of the market, while WEA held 21.1%, SONY had 14.7%, PGD 13.1%, BMG 10.7%, UNI 19.6%, and EMD held 8.7%. The indies began to garner significant percentages of the market in the early 90's and since 1996, they have held fourth, third and second places, consistently taking over 16% of the market. The rising popularity of hip-hop/rap, alternative rock (formerly punk and metal) and country explain the explosive growth of the indies in the past two decades. Some of the most important indie labels were formed in the early 80's, including Jive (part of the Zomba group of labels) Priority, Profile, Tommy Boy (Rap labels), TVT, Roadrunner, Mammoth, Restless, Relativity, Sub-Pop(alternative post-punk labels), Rykodisc and Big Beat. Many of these labels have remained independent, despite licensing deals and take-over bids by the Majors. According to one source, there are 3 times as many indie labels today as compared to a few decades ago, but only a 1/3 as many "successful" labels. Thus the indies have captured about 15% of the market, leaving the other 85% to the majors. Among the indies, most labels remain very small, with a typical label selling between 20,000 to 35,000 CD's a year. Some indies, however, are much larger in scope like Alligator and Rounder, two very successful labels that have been around for 30 years.

The big difference between the explosion of so-called independent labels in the 1990's and the explosion of the independent labels in the 1950s is that in the fifties independent labels really were independent. They were independently owned and independently distributed. More importantly, none of them had pressing deals, or joint venture deals with the majors. Indie labels in the fifties operated on the periphery of the music recording industry. Today, most successful indie labels are connected to the majors in one way or another through joint ventures, pressing deals, or even through an independent distributor that is partially owned by a major. There are hardly any such things as truly independent record companies anymore. The structure of the music recording industry is an oxymoron: less independence yet more dispersion and fragmentation.

For the year 2002, independent labels accounted for 205,212 of the 288,591 albums that were released, or about 71% of titles. Yet, the indies had only 17% of the market in total sales, which means that the majors captured 83% of the market in sales of units, while only releasing 30% of the albums last year. But these numbers can be slightly misleading, given the way that the industry and *Billboard* magazine in particular distinguishes between “indie” and “major.” According to *Billboard*, an album, or compact disc, is considered indie if it is distributed by an indie distributor. So, what counts in the industry is distribution (which may explain their collective anxiety regarding downloading music over the Internet. The Internet is a distribution system that can’t be easily corralled). Many of the releases counted as “major” are mostly indie owned, while many of the “indies” are partially owned by the majors. So the organization of the market into independent labels and major labels does not give you an accurate idea of how much of the market is non-union.

The giant among the indie labels is Jive Records, one of the many imprints that comprise the Zomba family. The Zomba case is unique among the indies because its huge empire built mostly upon the success of Jive records, first established in 1981. And, almost all of the Zomba owned labels are non-signatory, with Reunion Records being the exception. The Zomba Music group is an example of the third model of the “post-Fordist” arrangement between majors and indies, where the major has only a partial ownership stake in an indie label, but exclusive, or virtually exclusive distribution rights. In this case, the signatory corporation BMG decentralizes its production by farming it out to the non-union company, Zomba. BMG has accomplished this in two ways: first, BMG sold Reunion records to Zomba in 1996, then in the same year, it purchased a 20% stake in Zomba's records division. While Zomba is not considered to be an independent label because it is distributed by BMG, it is mostly independently owned, and it has amassed a large empire, the giant among independently owned record companies. Zomba's labels and producer's represent a kind of subcontracting in the record industry that allows BMG to develop a pattern of union avoidance.

The Zomba Music group, founded as Zomba Enterprises Inc in 1978 by Clive Calder (currently the CEO of Zomba) has grown into an enormous international empire of more than 50 companies - encompassing record label imprints, music publishing, recording studios, distribution companies, online licensing agreements and production music libraries, and equipment rental companies - with annual sales that range between \$50-100 million[285]. Based in New York City, Zomba remains a mostly independently owned and privately held company, but it does have significant ties to the majors and to BMG in particular. Unlike Tommy Boy, which is half-owned by Warner, but independently distributed, Zomba is mostly independently owned but distributed by a BMG in the U.S. and Canada, and by Virgin in Latin America, Europe and Africa. For that reason, Zomba is not considered an indie by the industry, and as such it doesn't appear as an indie in the *Billboard* charts.

Zomba's imprint labels have been very successful in the past decade, and last year in particular, with 6 albums among the top 50 best selling albums in 2000. The Zomba owned imprint Jive had the number 1 and number 2 selling albums of 2000 with the Backstreet Boys and Britney Spears respectively. The BackStreet Boys album "Millennium" sold 6.4 million units and Spears' album Baby One More Time sold 5.7 million units in 2000. Jive Records was so successful in 2000 that it garnered fully 7.9% of market share. The Zomba imprint group as a whole, was the second best selling group of labels in 2000 taking 8.75% of market share. The Zomba family of imprints has albums of almost every genre occupying places in Billboard's top 200 charts. Tool, a rock band on the *Volcano* label, successful hip-hip (rap) artists Too Short, Tribe Called Quest, and KRS-ONE from the *Jive* label, pop singer R. Kelly on the *Jive* label, Christian singer Michael Smith on the *Reunion* label, and the Christian act Jars of Clay on the *Essential/Silvertone* label, have all been mainstays in the top 200 for the past 5 years. Zomba has already managed to place albums in the top 100 best selling albums of all time with the Backstreet Boys, N'Sync, and Britney Spears respectively. All the labels above, with the exception of Reunion, are non-signatory labels. The Zomba/BMG arrangement has the dubious distinction of being the leader in union avoidance, based upon the number of albums recorded by Zomba and manufactured and distributed by BMG. Other majors like WEA are following suit with similar deals. The case of Zomba, is particularly threatening to the AFM, because it has set a dangerous precedent: namely, the majors have a good example of a very big company that does not recognize the union. So why should the majors recognize the union? The gradual unraveling of the compact between big companies and "big" labor in the music industry might become an abrupt separation of the majors decide to adopt the Zomba paradigm.

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[285] These sales figures are based upon information provided by *The Wall Street Journal*.

The other majors have established significant equity deals like the one between BMG and Zomba, and like the deal between BMG and Zomba, these arrangements are good examples of union avoidance. There are a myriad of examples where arrangements between major and indie labels undermine the AFM. Examples of other important joint venture and equity deals include the following: Warner's has equity deal with Tommy Boy mentioned above, Island/Def Jam's (owned by Universal/Vivendi) equity deal with Roadrunner Records (Sepultura, Slipknot), EMI's equity deal with Priority records, another successful hip-hop label, Atlantic records' joint venture with Mammoth records, and Capitol records' equity deal with Matador records [286].

The other post-Fordist arrangement that creates the conditions for a growing market share of non-union record labels, is the equity deals between major labels and independent *distribution* companies, like SONY's stake in RED distribution, the largest independent distributor in the U.S. Red distribution is mostly known for its punk rock labels like Epitaph (Rancid) and Roadrunner (Sepulura), but RED also distributes the rap powerhouse Loud records, which has a joint venture with RCA records[287]. Or take the case of Alternative Distribution Alliance (ADA), which distributes Tommy Boy, Sub Pop (the label that broke Nirvana) and Strictly Rhythm, which has a joint venture arrangement with Warner Music Group. ADA distribution is 65% owned by Warner Music Group, 20% owned by Restless records, 10% owned by indie label Sub-Pop and 5% owned by indie label Mute records[288]. EMD has a piece of the action too, with a controlling interest in Caroline distribution, which is also a successful indie distribution company that focuses mostly on punk or alternative rock labels like Scratchie (the label that broke

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[286] *Billboard*, November 23, 1996, July 13,1996, and June 15, 1996.

[287] *Billboard*, January 29, 2000.

[288] *Billboard*, June 3, 1995.

Smashing Pumpkins) and Dischord (Minor Threat, Fugazi). Thus, not only do the majors have equity and joint ventures with all of the best selling indies, they also have equity deals with three of the biggest indie distributors. All of these examples are examples of the outsourcing of production, and union avoidance because in some cases, the major buys partial interest, in other cases they merely distribute CD's. Almost all the indies distributed by RED, ADA and Caroline are non-union labels.

The structure of the music industry today has blurred the distinction between indie and major, but the labor law remains stuck in the industrial era. If a label is less than half owned by a major label, then the major isn't responsible, legally, for any recording work that takes place at the indie label. As a result, neither the indie label, nor the major label is concerned with honoring the terms of the AFM's labor contract and recording contract. All these examples are classic cases of union avoidance. So while the forces of production change the structure of the recording industry, labor law isn't able to protect the interests of the musicians working in the industry. Whether a major has almost half ownership of an indie company, or whether it merely distributes an indie label, in neither case is it or the indie required, legally, to adhere to the terms of the Phonograph Record Labor Agreement or the Phonograph Record Trust Agreement. Even as the major is intimately involved with the indie label, legally, the indie is outside the purview of the terms of the contract, since the indie is a non-signatory.

This leaves the AFM unable to use labor contracts to enforce terms that protect professional musicians. In all the cases named above, the labels mentioned are non-union, or non-signatory indie labels that represent a growing share of the market. As the indies take more of the market, and as more of the indies provide the majors with non-union musicians, the AFM loses money and members. By combining the 17-20% of the market controlled by the indies and the 9% of the market controlled by the Zomba labels – which are considered by *Billboard* magazine to be among the market share of the majors - alone, that accounts for at least 30% of the total market of CD. If you consider that many of the "non-indie" distributed labels like Loud records are non-union labels, then the market share for non-union made CD's approaches 40%. Many of these labels have albums that have reached "gold" status at the RIAA, selling over 500,000 copies. And, in all these examples, the indies are, more and more, becoming part of the establishment even as they have "independent" control over their conditions of production. Unlike a few decades ago when the indies were truly outside the "establishment," today the indies are an integral part of the major labels' corporate plan to challenge the role of the AFM in the recording industry, a strategy that mimics the widespread corporate assault on union labor general all throughout the United States. It is a misnomer to say that the indies represent a challenge to the corporate control of the entertainment industry. On the contrary, the indies are unwittingly involved in a process that continues corporate control of America's music culture by a handful of companies. As such, the indies find themselves in an ironic place, as the 'anti-establishment' component of the establishment.

All of these examples demonstrate that the American Federation of Musicians seriously undermined its own structural position in the music industry by writing off rock and roll music fifty years ago. That pattern repeated itself with punk rock and hip hop, two genres of music that the musicians' union knows next to nothing about. As bad as things are, however, the musicians' union is making moves to correct the mistakes of the past.

CONCLUSION: SIGNS OF HOPE FOR THE MUSICIAN'S UNION

One good sign that the musicians' union is working in the right direction, is that a few locals in the union are speaking out about how the AFM blew it with rock and roll. For example local 6 in San Francisco discusses the very issue on their homepage, http://www.afm6.org/localhistory.htm. According to local 6,

> There are a few reasons for [the] erosion of [our union's] power…[one] reason was the disregard for changes in popular culture. About every ten or twenty years a new musical genre comes along that is different from the previous generation's view of what is considered "music." The first example is Ragtime. The Union [AFM] hated it! And then jazz. That's not music! Eventually those styles become the norm. Skip forward to rhythm and blues and rock and roll. The union neglected the new styles while at the same time it was losing its hold on the entertainment industry. Failing to accept the music of the huge baby boomer generation was a big mistake. When the union finally came around, it was too late. Recent trends in music (punk, new wave, rap, metal, hip hop, DJ's etc.) were not even on the radar.

Indeed. That local 6 has gone public with difficult reflections like the one above, where they admit the American Federations of Musicians made a "mistake," is an important step in the right direction. More locals, and the international itself need to take a long hard look at their members as well as their outlook on "music" if there is to be any hope that the union can save itself. As it stands now, classical and jazz music is still the dominant culture in the union, and as long as that remains the case the musicians' union is doomed.

There are locals, like local 47 in Los Angeles that have begun reaching out to the new generation of musicians and new styles of music. Local 47 has opened up a recording studio in their building and they encourage up and coming local bands to record there and learn the ropes of day-to-day business operations in the music industry. That approach seems very promising. In New York City, insurgent rank and file members of local 802 have formed their own group, the "Noise Action Coalition," led by the accomplished guitarist Marc Ribot, to organize clubs downtown that have been outside the local's purview for many decades. The Noise Action Coalition is pushing local 802 to be more aggressive in organizing and give the downtown scene as much attention and resources as they give to Broadway musicians and the symphony and jazz musicians at Lincoln Center. Ultimately, a union is only as good as its rank and file, and the Noise Action Coalition is a good example for rank and file members lighting a fire under the feet of their union representatives.

There is also hope for professional musicians in the recording industry. While the changing structure of the music recording industry has eroded the pay for professional musicians and undermined their union, things maybe turning around, as high profile musicians like Courtney Love, Don Henley and Ani DiFranco begin to speak out about the structure of stealing prevalent in the industry. Popular royalty artists need to continue to raise awareness about the unfair nature of the industry among other musicians as well as the consumers of music. Maybe the solidarity that the AFM once displayed between the superstar recording artists and the lesser known studio musicians and live engagement musicians working smaller venues, may be kindled again, as more and more famous recording artists work together with the leadership of the musicians' union. Don Henley established the Recording Artists Coalition (RAC) to address the issue of electronic file sharing of music on the internet as well as the issue of unfair recording contracts that exploit recording artists, and recently the RAC had been working with the AFM on both issues. The AFM, for its part, needs to abandon the corporate/business unionism model and begin a new organizing campaign that can adjust to the new structure of the music recording industry. The union can no longer view itself as junior partner to the major record companies, because the companies are no longer what they seem to be as they branch out in several different directions. It also needs to expand its point of view on “music,” in order to launch a long overdue organizing campaign. Perhaps the efforts of the RAC and insurgent rank and file musicians’ groups like Noise Action Coalition can recreate labor solidarity among musicians as well as help to spark the imagination of the working class once again.

APPENDIX

Appendix A: The Social/Economic Transition from Fordism to Post-Fordism

Fordism	Post-Fordism
Manufacturing core based in North/East	Decline of manufacturing base and rise of "sun-belt" computer based industries
Large industrial complexes	More "flexible" de-centralized labor process
Centralized labor force	Transition to information/service economy
Centralized bureaucracy	Contracting out of functions
Blue-collar work/Skilled labor	"Knowledge" workers, non-union labor
Union labor/collective bargaining	
Full Employment	Part-time, temporary, contingent work
Mass markets for cheap, standardized goods	emphasis on more choice and product differentiation
Regional economies	Globalization of financial markets, linked by Communication innovations
Welfare state/Strong Nation State	Disintegration of welfare state, rise of multinational corporate power

Appendix B: Record labels owned and partly owned by Warner Music Group

WMG
(Total revenue 2002: $4.2 billion.
Total corporate for AOL/Time Warner: $36.2 billion)

4 AD
Antoine's*
Aquemini*
Asylum
Atlantic
Big Beat
Blackbird*
Blitzz
Celtic Heartbeat*
Che*
Curb
Desert Storm*
Discovery
East West American
Elektra
Elementree*
Fishkin
*Flavor Unit
Giant
Igloo
John Dough
Kinetic*
Lava
Luaka Bop
Mammoth*
Maverick*
Nonesuch
Pyramid
Qwest
Reprise
Resound
Rhino*
Sire
Slash
Sub Pop*
The Music Label*
Tommy Boy*
Top Dog*
Warner Bros.

(* Represents equity of joint venture deal with a non-union label)

Appendix C: Labels owned and partially owned by Vivendi/Universal

UMG
(Total revenue 2002: $5 billion.
Total revenue Vivendi/Universal: $41.8 billion)

40 Acres and a Mule
A&M
Abkco
Aftermath*
Almo
Antilles
Attic
Bloodline*
Blue
Capricorn
Cargo
CGI*
Cherry Entertainment*
Chronicles
City of Angels*
Decca
Def Jam*
Def Squad*
Deutsche Gramm.
Dream Works
Eleven*
Flawless*
Flip*
Flyte Time*
Fort Apace
Geffen
GTSP*
H.O.L.A.*
Hollywood
House of Blues
Imaginary*
Impact*
Interscope
Island
Kedar*
Lil' Man*
Load*
Mammoth*
MCA
Mercury
Mercury/Curb*
MoJazz
Mojo*
Motown
Murder Inc.*
Nothing
Outpost*
Pallas*
Phillips
Point Music
Polygram
Radio Active*
Rebound
Roadrunner*
Roc-a-fellah*
Scratchie*
Spun Out*
Twisted*
Verve

(* Represents equity of joint venture deal with a non-union label)

Appendix D: Labels owned and partially owned by Bertelsmann Music Group

BMG
(Revenue 2002: $2.2 billion
Total corporate revenue for Bertelsmann AG: $7.5 billion)

Arista
Bad Boy*
BMG Classics
Flipmode*
J Records*
Laface
Melisma*
RCA/Victor
RLG
Time Bomb*
Wicklow*
Windham Hill
Wyclef*
Zomba* (18 labels)

(* Represents equity of joint venture deal with a non-union label)

Appendix E: Labels owned and partially owned by EMI

EMI
(Revenue 2002 from records: $3.3 billion.
Total corporate revenue for EMD: $3.9 billion)

Angel
Anise*
Blue Moon
Blue Note
Capitol
Doggystyle*
EMI Christian*
EMI Latin*
EMI
Ensign*
Global Pacific
I.R.S.
Java*
Jobete*
Manhattan*
Mesa
Netwerk
Pangaea
Priority*
Roswell*
Virgin

(* Represents equity of joint venture deal with a non-union label)

Appendix F: Labels owned and partially owned by SONY

SONY Music Group
(Revenue 2002: $6.4 billion.
Total corporate revenue: $63 billion)

550 Music
American Recordings*
Aware
Big Cat*
C2
Caviant
Chaos*
Columbia
Crave*
Creation*
Crescent Moon*
Epic
Essential Classics
Facility
Flip*
Foodchain
Hall of Fame
Higher Ground
Immortal*
Independiente*
Jersey*
Lifestyle*
Loud*
Lucky Dog
MJJ*
Mosh*
Myrra*
New Deal*
Okeh
Ruffhouse*
Ruthless*
Skint*
So So Def*
SONY Latin*
SONY
SONY Tropical*
Soundtrax*
Stone Creek*
Trackmasters*
Tri-Star*
Vivarte
Word*
Yab Yum*

(* Represents equity of joint venture deal with a non-union label)

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