In his work, *The Lion's Share*, Bernard Porter states that there is no such thing as an imperial culture that had a deep or widespread impact on Great Britain. He thinks that no one in today’s Britain should feel pride or shame for the old empire because it has absolute nothing to do with them. “Culture coloured British imperialism, but was not responsible for it, or significantly affected by it.”¹

It is bewildering as to how one can consider Great Britain today and not recognize the monumental legacy the empire has left behind, especially on aspects of culture and identity. Perhaps imperialism is so deeply engraved in the identity of the British that they simply can not see this legacy. Perhaps Bernard Porter can not pull a distinct imperial culture out of British culture because the two are actually one in the same.

It is particularly interesting how the metropole reacted to the empire after its extinction. Joni Mitchell once sang, “Don’t it always seem to go that you don’t know what you got ‘til it’s gone?” The effects of the empire really became apparent once the days of Britain’s imperial glory were through. The imperial legacy influenced all areas of British society and all people who called themselves British. In fact, Britain’s imperial past had so deeply affected the culture of the metropole that even the counter-culture of the 1960s was permeated by it.

As Ralph Samuel observed in 1959, “Britain, on the eve of the Sixties, is a society divided against itself.”² This divide was a generational one because the current generation of Britain’s youth could not relate to the previous generations of the Empire. The counter-culture of the 1960s was driven by young people who had not been born into the

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glory of the British Empire and they rebelled against the imperial culture of their parents’ generation. Thus, the culture of the 1960s that was created had many elements that were converse to those of their parents’ culture. However, the ultimate purpose here is to show that it was actually the empire that was driving their rebellion and that the cultural differences of the counter-culture were not quite as different as the youth of the sixties had thought they were—due to the strength of the imperial legacy. First, the rebellious nature of the counter-culture must be established so that the disparity of its imperial permeation will be more striking.

One major distinguishing component of the counter-culture was an anti-establishment attitude. After the world wars, the youth of Great Britain were not happy with the restrictions placed on society and they blamed the establishment for their hardships. They rebelled against any form of control by the government or by the people at the higher end of society because of the deep class rifts that the empire left in its wake. The counter-culture did not believe in supporting a social structure that would perpetuate these rifts, but rather in the rights and the dignity of the average human being.

Given all of the scandal that was occurring in the establishment at this time, the criticisms of the counter-culture seemed warranted. For example, the utter hypocrisy of the government in condemning the youth culture for their exertion of sexual freedom during a time of such sexual scandal amongst politicians was striking. The Profumo was the major scandal on every British tongue in 1963. The secretary of state of war had allegedly had a sexual encounter with a young girl who may or may not have been collaborating with the Russians. At the same time, another cabinet member was caught in

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a public park with a prostitute; and there was yet another instance where eight high court judges were allegedly engaged in an orgy.\(^4\) It seemed as if the government had no moral authority to tell the youth of Britain how to act during this decade, with their “do as I say, not as I do” scandals.

Another important component of the counter-culture is spirituality. Almost everything the youth culture popularized at this time was driven by some spiritual purpose or search for enlightenment, whether it was through care for the environment, unconditional acceptance, religion, world peace, or even drug use. Psychedelic experiences achieved the same kind of communion that was achieved by means of natural spirituality, so mind-altering drugs such as LSD became very prominent at this time. “Psychedelic experience enables integration of self with all life forms and all history.”\(^5\)

The “big picture” that became clear through psychedelic experience was that everyone was connected on some level—and only through the realization of this fact could the universe really be at peace. Thus the ultimate goal was always transcendence or enlightenment for the counter-culture of the 1960s.

Along these lines, the youth of the sixties were determined to promote the good treatment of the earth given the utter destruction to the landscapes all over the world during the rule of the British Empire. They were very much opposed to the ecological damage that western “progress” had caused in places like Africa and India. The counter-culture that emerged in America at this time even went so far with this sentiment as to create Earth Day—an entire day to appreciate the beauty of the environment. Similarly, a

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philosophy of naturalistic simplicity became very fashionable at this time as young people in England adopted a “back to basics” attitude.

The permeation by imperialism of the components of the counter-culture that have been discussed can be illustrated through an examination of the popular music of the sixties. Quite often, an historical decade can be defined by its musical movement, or at least associated with the genre of music that was prevalent during that time. For counter-cultures, music was not only another means of rebellion and a way to convey its grievances, but also a means of solidarity that gave it a sense of identity:

The musical taste and the collective sense of identity to which such taste often gives rise may grow out of a shared sense of experience or the aesthetic and political values that members attach to a particular popular music genre resulting from circumstances encountered in specific localities.6

This sense of cohesion that the counter-culture found in popular music also gave the movement a great deal of strength. As Andy Bennett says in his study of popular music and youth culture, “There are numerous instances where mass culture—and in particular popular music—issues serious challenges to hegemonic power.”7 For the counter-culture of Britain, popular music was a means of rebelling against the cultural control held by their parents, the government, and the imperial legacy. Also, attempts by the government in the 1960s to minimize the effects of rock and roll “created a sense of confinement and repression in which underground movements flourished.”8 Disdain for the idea of being confined under the weight of Britain’s establishment, the same

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7 Bennett 40.
8 Bennett 42.
establishment that perpetuated the empire, was the real fuel behind the counter-culture movement.

The means of rebellion that proved most effective for the counter-culture of the sixties was criticism of their parents’ imperial identity and the empire itself because it had affected Britain’s culture and identity that deeply. The youth’s criticisms of the empire and of their parents’ generation were, of course, naturally reflected in the popular music of the generation. Bennett says:

…rock’n’roll music and the sensibilities that it had apparently inspired were incomprehensible to the parent culture…[and have] continued to drive a wedge between the generations and to mark off youth from the parent culture ever more dramatically.9

The pop music of the sixties confused and angered the Britons who had grown up praising the glory of the Empire and did a lot to foster a wide-spread disaffection for it amongst Britain’s youth.

In the year 1969, an album was released by a rock and roll band called “The Kinks”—a rock opera about an ordinary man who watched the empire pass him by. The title of the album was *Arthur, Or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire* and was originally intended to become a musical television drama. This never came to fruition, but the well-received music album offered a complex narrative of Great Britain was dealing with the legacy of the empire. As Peter Dogget said in the album jacket, there was a “weight of tradition that both protected and suffocated everyone who had grown up

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with faith in the British Empire.”10 It was clear to the counter-culture that it was time for the weight of the past to be lifted and the only way to do this was to expose the obsolescence of the imperial culture. If Bernard Porter’s claim was true and there was no significant imperial culture, then the counter-culture would not have felt so strongly against it decades after the Empire had fallen.

The Kinks’ story of Arthur starts off with a defense of imperialism in the song “Victoria” to show the good faith of all who had grown up in the glory of the empire. Intense nationalism can be detected when Arthur speaks of his gratitude for being born into such a wonderful country for which he would gladly give his life. But as the tracks progress, it becomes apparent that Arthur is starting to question the legitimacy of his country’s empire and the idea of imperialism in general. He also contemplates military atrocities in songs like “Yes Sir, No Sir” and “Some Mother’s Son”, where he seems confused that “the world keeps turning, though all the children have gone away.”11 Arthur cannot seem to understand why, if the Empire is so grand, so many of its ‘children’ must lose their lives.

He also takes note of the escapist attitude that was so prevalent amongst Britons during their time of Empire. In “Drivin’”, Arthur describes how Britons distract themselves with talk of tea and gooseberry tarts while “all the troubled world around us seems an eternity away.”12 It did not seem right to the youth of the counter-culture that the residents of Great Britain were burying their heads in the sand while the rest of the empire, which they were meant to be protecting, was experiencing such hardships. In

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11 The Kinks “Some Mother’s Son”.
12 The Kinks “Drivin’”.
Arthur’s story, he is realizing that the British would continue to venerate the Empire as long as they did not have to see its atrocities with their own eyes.

Class-related criticisms were made very clear through more blatant songs, like “Brainwashed” and “Mr. Churchill Says”, which talk about the injustices of the upper classes in the Empire. “Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed to so few/ ‘cos they have made our British Empire a better place for me and you/ and this was their finest hour.” The message here was that the British Empire had nothing to offer the common citizen—and this is why this album was so appealing to the counter-culture of the 1960s. They did not believe that they owed the imperial generation anything because the Empire only perpetuated the wealth of a very small portion of the British aristocracy.

Young people could identify with Arthur. They understood his confusion, his disillusionment, and his desire for a new direction. The end of the album deals with Arthur’s awareness that the days of the Empire were gone and that it was for the better. The song “Nothing to Say” is about how Arthur feels absolutely no connection to his father or the imperial generation. It seems to be a moment of liberation when he says, “We can’t do tomorrow what we did yesterday/ It’s best that we’re going our separate ways, OK?” Almost every adolescent that was part of the counter-culture could relate to that. The last track on the album, “Arthur”, is an outside account of his life that was decorated with sympathy for how people like him just got swallowed up in the British Empire. This album was meant to signify a breaking away from the imperial mentality of the past and creating a new identity of racial and class tolerance where all the members of the former empire could live in harmony.

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14 The Kinks, “Nothing to Say”.
Even bigger than the influence of *Arthur* was the impact of four working-class boys who rose from their humble origins in the maritime city of Liverpool to shape the identity of a young generation of Brits. The Beatles stormed the scene of British entertainment in the early sixties and gave the nation something to talk about. They were attractive, refreshing, and stimulating. Everything they said, sang, ate, and wore both reflected and influenced the new British identity. Paul McCartney once said, “The Beatles weren’t the leaders of the generation, but the spokesmen”\(^{15}\) John Lennon later commented, “We were part of whatever the 60s was. It was happening itself. We were the ones chosen to represent what was going on ‘on the street’. It could have been somebody else but it wasn’t.”\(^{16}\) Over the years the Beatles have come to represent Great Britain in the 1960s—actually, the most thorough portrayals of the counter-culture can be found in studies of the Beatles because they were the epitome of British culture at this time.

Much like the Kinks and their work in *Arthur*, the Beatles were leading the counter-culture in their rebellion against the imperial culture of the parental generation. They did this through their utter disrespect for anything that pertained to the British Empire or the British establishment. Their music was very clearly representative of the disenchantment that the counter-culture was feeling toward its nation’s past—and their actions and attitudes were even more direct.

*The White Album*, which was released in 1968, blatantly rejected imperialism through “The Continuing Story of Bungalow Bill” and “While My Guitar Gently Weeps”. The story of Bungalow Bill is about a tiger-hunter in which the theme of


questioning the validity of the values of the parental generation. “The children asked him if to kill was not a sin/ Not when he looked so fierce his mother butted in/ If looks could kill, it would have been us instead of him.” With the tiger being the symbol of India, it is not hard to see that this song portrays children who do not understand the violence of imperialism and then getting empty answers from their elders. Here, the attitude of Bungalow Bill’s mother seems to be that they were forced to be violent in the Empire because of the fierce nature of the periphery. George Harrison’s song, “While My Guitar Gently Weeps”, is a more direct criticism to the state of the world. He says, “I don’t know how someone controlled you/ they bought and sold you… I look at the world and I notice it’s turning/ while my guitar gently weeps/ With every mistake, we surely must be learning/ still my guitar gently weeps.” This was a call for the youth of the nation to move away from the mistakes of the imperial culture so that Great Britain could redeem itself.

One effective way that the Beatles represented the desire of the counter-culture to separate themselves from the culture of their parents was by showing intense disdain for the upper classes of British society. Quite often, they Fab Four were “looking through the bent-back tulips to see how the other half lives.” George Harrison wrote a very clever pseudo-baroque style song about the backwardness and hypocrisy of the upper classes. “Piggies” compares the pigs in the dirt to the pigs in white shirts and implies that the latter should actually be admired less. He says, “You can see them out for dinner with

17 The Beatles, “The Continuing Story of Bungalow Bill” The White Album (EMI Records Ltd., 1968)
18 The Beatles, “While My Guitar Gently Weeps”
19 The Beatles, “Glass Onion”
their piggy wives/ clutching forks and knives to eat their bacon.” Not only is Harrison making very ugly implications about the upper class by comparing them to pigs, but he is also implying that they are so hypocritical that they would not hesitate to actually eat each other!

Very similarly to the Kinks’ work in *Arthur*, the Beatles also portrayed the story of the working class being oppressed by the rich and powerful people of Great Britain—however; it was done through film in addition to music. *A Hard Day’s Night* was released in 1964 and followed the Beatles through a dramatization of their work routine. The boys are portrayed as indifferent to the harshness of their superiors throughout the film to depict the patronizing disapproval of the imperial culture as empty criticism. For example, there is a scene on the train where they have an argument with a wealthy older gentleman about keeping the window open. He looks down his nose at the four them and says “And to think, I fought in the war for your sort”, to which one of the Beatles responds, “The older generation is leading this country to campy ruin”. There were also instances in the film that deliberately obliterated the name of the nation, the most blatant one being the scene where John Lennon is in the bathtub singing “Oh Britannia” and crashing toy British naval ships into the water.

That film was made very early on in their career, but once the Beatles attained enough power in British society, they made a barefaced stab against the upper class corporations of British society. A company called Apple Corps. Ltd was founded in 1967 by the Fab Four “…to offer an alternative way of doing business that…would

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20 The Beatles, “Piggies”  
consequently challenge the principles of the straight world.”22 This establishment was as anti-establishment as they came. This was a chance for all of the artists who were turned away from opportunity by the British aristocracy to come as they were to a company that was willing to allow them to share in its riches. The Beatles felt that they had been given an opportunity that led them to everything they had ever wanted and that they should use those riches to pass the chance along to those who had been cheated by the system. At Apple, there was no dress code, no drug restrictions, and no dictatorial supervisors to impose on the true spirit of the music industry. Paul McCartney described it on The Johnny Carson Show as, “an experiment in ‘controlled weirdness’ or ‘Western communism.’”23 The fact that the Beatles were flirting with socialism through this experimental company was a very serious threat to the establishment of the imperial culture.

Another effective way the Beatles represented the counter-culture’s rebellion toward the imperial culture was through their interaction with Britain’s royalty. The Queen of England has been called, “the figure who, next to God, was the most awesome symbol of the empire.”24 The Beatles, being as influential in Britain as they were, came into contact with the nation’s monarch on several occasions. How the Fab Four responded to her said a great deal, not only about how they felt toward Britain’s empire, but how the counter-culture felt toward it as well.

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23 Turner 155.
In 1965, the boys received notice that they were to be given the title of Member of the British Empire from the Queen.\textsuperscript{25} It is of little surprise that they were not as thrilled as most would have been to be presented with such an honor, but they went along with the gimmick anyway—even though they did not believe in what it stood for. John Lennon said, “Taking the MBE was a sell out for me…We’d nothing to lose, except that bit of you which said you didn’t believe in it.”\textsuperscript{26} It was even rumored that the boys had been smoking pot in the toilets of Buckingham Palace on the day they received their medals. The Beatles had absolute no respect for the titles after they had received them either. Two years later, George Harrison and Paul McCartney wore their medals on the album cover of Sgt Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band, on which they appeared not as themselves, but as members of a fictitious pop band.\textsuperscript{27} This was conveying the message that the real Beatles were not people who considered themselves Members of the British Empire and did not condone the imperial culture.

Several previous recipients of this very prestigious award returned it after hearing that it was granted to the Fab Four because they felt like it was a disservice to imperial glory and honor. To this gesture, John Lennon responded, “They got [the medals] for killing people. We deserve ours for not killing people. If you get a medal for killing, you should certainly get a medal for singing and keeping Britain’s economics in good nick!” and Paul McCartney responded, “most people seemed to feel that we were a great export and ambassadors for Britain.”\textsuperscript{28} It was this kind of cheekiness emulated by the Beatles.

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Anthology} 183.
\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Anthology} 183.
that threatened the establishment and sent a message of complete disregard for the royal traditions of Great Britain.

In 1963, the Beatles had their chance to actually perform in front of the Queen. Instead of the boys being nervous about performing live in front of such an important audience, their manager, Brian Epstein, was terrified that they would not act appropriately and thus lose their positive reputation forever. The short four-song spot went very well, until it came time for John Lennon to introduce their closing number, “Twist and Shout”. He reportedly said to the audience, “For our last number, I’d like to ask your help. The people in the cheaper seats, clap your hands, and the rest of you, if you’d just rattle your [fucking] jewelry.”

John had been rehearsing that line all day, but decided to delete the expletive during the actual performance (much to Epstein’s relief). Still, the press was all over the comment the next day, as newspapers ran stories under the headline of *Beatles Rock the Royals!* This particular instance of the Beatles’ indifference to the royalty was considered outrageous—therefore admirable to the youth of the counter-culture—and really set an example for the attitudes that the youth would have toward Britain’s establishment. As Bob Spitz says in his biography, “…in London, only John Lennon could upstage the Queen.”

The Beatles did not buy into the idea of subservience to the monarchy whatsoever. For instance, it was mandatory after certain performances to play a recording of “God Save the Queen”—but the Beatles, to further undermine the royal establishment, would use this time to clear the stage and exit discretely through a back door. As for their opinions of the Queen herself, Lennon later commented, “I really think the Queen

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30 Spitz 434.
31 Spitz 456.
believes in it all. I don’t believe in John Lennon, Beatle, being any different from anyone else, because I known he’s not...But I’m sure the Queen thinks she’s different.” 32 This opinion was reflective of the counter-culture’s attitude toward the growing class problem in Great Britain at the time and also of the rejection of the divinity of monarchs.

It is clear that popular music during the sixties verified the counter-culture’s strong desire to rid itself of the imperial past that their parents represented. But had the counter-culture necessarily been successful at evading the permeation of the imperialism that they hated into its own culture? Porter would think that they had been successful because in his opinion, the empire barely had an impact on its own generations’ culture—but issues that have been raised here suggest that a deeper exploration of this question is warranted. One factor that would have prevented the counter-culture from evading the effects of the Empire was the identity crisis that the nation was facing at the time. Once the British Empire had fallen, Britons had a hard time determining exactly what it was that made them British. As former Secretary of State, Dean Acheson said, “Great Britain [had] lost an empire and not yet found a role.” 33 The devolution movement, which gained increasing support after the fall of the Empire, had seriously confused the citizens of the ‘not-so-United Kingdom’. In fact, during this time some British people began to identify with Europe for the first time in British history, despite the enduring geographic barrier of the English Channel that had previously indicated a dramatic distinction of the British Isles.

Recently, some historians have alleged that there was never anything that could be called a British, or even an English, identity. As Robert J.C. Young says in his work, *The Idea of English Ethnicity*, “throughout the nineteenth century, the English were far more likely to define themselves as Saxon or Celt than ‘English’ until the exigencies of empire forced them to invent a brand name identity that would strengthen the sympathetic bonds between the expat and domestic communities.”34 In other words, without the Empire, there were no such beings as Englishmen, making the loss of their empire particularly traumatic. There was therefore nothing to hold together a nation of Britons once the Empire had fallen. Anthony Eden unwittingly summed up this phenomenon very well:

> Our thoughts move across the seas to the many communities in which our people play their part, in every corner of the world. These are our family ties. That is our life. Without it, we should be no more than some millions of people living on an island off the coast of Europe, in which nobody wants to take any particular interest.35

Clearly, the loss of empire undermined the identity of the metropole. The imperial generation of Britain viewed the counter-culture as such a direct threat because their country, for as long as they could remember, had always been defined by its Empire. But the sense of identity that the Empire created was so strong that it proved impossible even for the counter-culture rebels of the 1960s to construct an identity without using the legacy of the Empire and the imperial culture of their parents as a base to build off of.

Womack and Davis in their cultural study observed that the counter-culture even recognized this fact: “the past, since it cannot really be destroyed...must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently.”\textsuperscript{36} Thus, the use of parody was very popular amongst the counter-culture. The Beatles made ironic plays on everything, including themselves; however, Womack and Davis made another telling observation about this phenomenon: “The Beatles made ironic reference...thus both distancing themselves from the past and reinscribing those styles into a new historical moment with new meaning.”\textsuperscript{37} In other words, at the same time the Beatles were moving away from the imperial culture that the youth of the 1960s despised, they were actually borrowing elements of it and popularizing them in a new way.

The counter-culture selectively used cultures from the former colonies and adopted certain components of those cultures to fit their new one. This was particularly true of Indian culture in the 1960s. Eastern culture, especially Eastern spirituality, seemed to fit everything that the counter-culture movement had been pushing for (environmentalism, pacifism, naturalism, etc.) and was the farthest thing away from the imperial British culture of their parents’ generation. In fact, the imperial generation very much looked down upon Eastern culture, deeming it backwards, frivolous, immoral, and unchanging. Thus, it became very popular amongst the youth culture to adopt Indian fashions, eat Indian food, and practice Indian forms of spirituality. As James W. Sire once said, “The swing to Eastern thought is...primarily a retreat from Western thought.”\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{36} Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack, eds., \textit{Reading the Beatles the Beatles: Cultural Studies, Literary Criticism, and the Fab Four} (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006) 156.
\textsuperscript{37} Davis and Womack 156.
\textsuperscript{38} Turner 139.
This idea of “going native” can best be illustrated by the wave of cultural fusion that the Beatles caused in their generation. In this way, the new counter-culture that the Beatles endorsed was actually tinted with the colors of empire. Their introduction to Indian culture came to them by coincidence in 1965 on the Caribbean set of their hit film, *Help!*. Taking almost no interest in the screenplay, the Fab Four went through with filming what turned out to be quite a racist portrayal of the formerly colonized people of India. The storyline was about the sacrificial ring of the Hindu goddess Kali, which just happened to be mulishly stuck on Ringo’s finger. The boys spend the rest of the film being chased by Indian “thugs” and trying to free themselves from the burden of this ring.

The cultural imprint of Empire is plain in this film. The mere portrayal of the Indian characters is indicative of the negative opinions Britons had of Hindus. Whenever an Indian “thug” appeared on screen, he was always accompanied by devious sitar music that seemed to put magic spells on non-Indians. The real Indian practice of Thuggee must be paid some attention because it contributes to the negative light this film shed on the Indian culture. Thuggee was the Indian practice of strangling unsuspecting travelers with a scarf as a sacrifice to the Hindu goddess of destruction, Kali. Of course, this was only practiced by ‘thugs’, or members of a secret society who preyed on the riches of wealthy travelers in India. The thugs were eventually repressed by a Brit named Sir William Sleeman through mass arrests and executions from 1829 to 1848.\(^39\) The fact that the Beatles were making a farce of being chased around by these Indian “thugs” did not project a positive image of the Empire’s periphery.

Also, their “filthy Eastern ways” were portrayed as very primitive because Indians were quite often compared to children or even animals during the Raj. In the film, Indians

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were seen sitting in trees and throwing coconuts at the Beatles, or lying on nail beds in the middle of an Indian restaurant. They were also portrayed as being a very vicious people, going after the Beatles with blowtorches and trapping Ringo in a basement with a tiger (the tiger being the symbol of India, just as the lion is the symbol of Britain). The whole premise of this film can be seen as profoundly symbolic of the stubborn hold that the imperial past had on Great Britain, even in its time of the counter-culture revolution.

The portrayal of Indian culture in this film was abysmal and stereotypical—but it exposed many young Britons (and a handful of older Britons) to the people and culture of their former colony none-the-less. As John Lennon recalls, “The first time that we were aware of anything Indian was when we were making Help!” George Harrison was particularly intrigued by the hypnotizing music that a group of Indians were playing on the set. He was mesmerized by the intensity of the sitar player and knew that he wanted to learn more about this culture. On George’s birthday, oddly enough, all the boys were given signed copies of “The Illustrated Book of Yoga.” He naturally took an immediate interest in the practices of yoga and meditation and it did not take long for the other three to follow suit, as they often did. But this was only the start of what would become for the Beatles a deep exploration of India and the rich culture it had to offer.

Over the next few years, George made several trips to India to learn more about the culture, practice the sitar, and study transcendental meditation. It was his fascination with the sitar, actually, that began his romance with Indian spirituality. He studied under world-renowned classical sitar player, Ravi Shankar, who told him that in order to really get deep into the music, he must go to India. So George went to Bombay and checked

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41 Apple Corps. Ltd., The Beatles Anthology 167.
into the Taj Mahal in 1967 in order to devote many hours to his mastery of the sitar. As Turner observes in his book, “Totally enchanted by the people, culture, music, and religion of India, George later surmised that he must have been an Indian in a previous incarnation.” In 1967, when the Beatles were creating their famous cover art for *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, George made sure that Indian culture was very well-represented. On the cover of this album, there was an image of a group of celebrities that the Beatles would have wanted to be in their audience. Harrison requested that famous gurus appear in the crowd, along with a four-armed Indian doll and an Indian water pipe.

On one occasion in 1967, all four Beatles and their significant others made a sort of pilgrimage to India to study transcendental meditation under the Mahareshi Mahesh Yogi. Even though they were supposed to be focusing on their mantras, Paul and John could not help but use the inspiration of their surroundings to write songs. A good portion of *The White Album* was either written in India, or written about the Beatles’ experiences at the ashram. This album was very influential to the counter-culture back in Britain, thus causing a permeation by the Indian imperial legacy of the identities of the sixties youth. Of course, anything that the Fab Four was into was immediately popularized amongst the youth of Great Britain—and Indian culture had become the latest fad at this point.

While it is true that the Beatles only stumbled upon Indian culture on the set of their film *Help!*, the wide-spread admiration of this culture amongst the counter-culture was much more than coincidental. The components that the Beatles admired so much

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42 Turner 138.
about Indian culture were the exact things that the youth culture of Britain was longing for—more so than any other culture of the periphery. As Steve Turner argues:

India, which had gained its independence from Britain only in [1947], had the added allure of not being part of the modernist world that the counter-culture was rebelling against. It wasn’t involved in Vietnam, ecological destruction, or economic oppression. Its religion wasn’t grim and puritanical.44

As it has already been established, pacifism, environmental awareness, economic equality, and spiritual transcendence were sentiments that really struck a chord with the youth of Great Britain in the sixties. Now, instead of looking to the great British leaders for examples on how to live, young people were looking toward the great spiritual gurus of India because they appealed to their sentiments more directly. For example, Swami Vishnu Devananda believed that there should be no boundaries between countries and that “Planet Earth” passports should be issued instead of country-specific ones because the world is something that should belong to every individual, regardless of any kind of divisions.45 So Indian culture provided a model for the counter-culture—and they would reform the imperial culture of their nation according to the components of this new model.

The adoption of the Indian culture by the counter-culture became another means of rebellion against the imperial generation because they were admiring the natives instead of demeaning them with the oppression of Empire as their parents would have done. The most basic way for the counter-culture to express admiration for Indian culture was through imitation, which it did in almost every way. For example, during the sixties,

44 Turner 139.
45 Anthology 171.
Indian styles and fashions became very popular amongst the young people of Britain. Young people started wearing simple, loose-fitting shirts, pajama pants, and saris so that their parents could visibly see their appreciation for a culture that the previous generation thought backwards. “To young Western eyes, the gurus in their simple clothing and long hair, with garlands of flowers around their necks, were far hipper than the average Protestant evangelist in his polyester suit.”46 The Beatles, who were considered to be the most attractive men in Britain at the time, were even sporting this look after they came back from India. Paul McCartney actually went to the launch party of the International Times in traditional Eastern dress.47 Other British music icons, like Donovan, were also very much into the Eastern fashion. Another way Indian style permeated the counter-culture during the 1960s was through interior design. Bungalow-style houses were suddenly considered more than just for exotic holiday get-aways. George Harrison’s home was of course very much in touch with his Eastern spirituality. He had Indian décor and artifacts scattered across every inch of his Esher bungalow and his furniture was arranged in such a way that the spiritual energy in the house would be enhanced.48

Another way the counter-culture used “going native” as a means of rebellion was by showing their awareness for the environment. Indian culture is a very naturalistic one that emphasizes a simple way of life and living off the land. This “back to basics” attitude corresponded to a deep respect for the earth and also to the hatred amongst the counter-culture for what modernization had done to the lands of the Empire. The Beatles showed their support for environmentalism as well, especially through their music. On The White Album (most of which was written in India), many of the songs reflected awareness of

46 Turner 139.
47 Stark 201.
48 Spitz 645.
nature. “Mother Nature’s Son” was clearly reflective of the counter-culture’s oneness with the earth. “Find me in my field of grass—Mother Nature’s son/ swaying daisies sing a lazy song beneath the sun.” 49 Also, “Dear Prudence” created awareness of nature by saying, “Dear Prudence, see the sunny skies/ The wind is low, the birds will sing/ that you are a part of everything/ Dear Prudence, won’t you open up your eyes?” 50 The growing issue of animal rights was also briefly alluded to on this album in “The Continuing Story of Bungalow Bill,” which is about a tiger-hunt that the boys came into contact with while they were in India.

The Beatles also adopted the idea of naturalistic simplicity into their own lives. For example, John Lennon purchased a small uninhabited island off the coast of Ireland called Dorinish. During the late sixties, he let a hippie group called the Diggers live there according to their naturalistic lifestyle that British society did not accept. 51 Also, to fit in with this ideal of simplicity, the counter-culture was changing the way it felt about food. Indian restaurants were very abundant throughout Great Britain at this time and the Indian diet was quite often much healthier than the bland traditional British diet that the earlier generations were used to. George and Paul even converted to vegetarianism because it was consistent with the ideal of harmony with the earth that was so prevalent in Indian culture. 52

Another means of rebellion that was consistent with the Indian culture was pacifism. Great Britain had a long-standing history of treating the indigenous people of the world with disrespect and outright violence—and this was the biggest part of the

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49 The Beatles, “Mother Nature’s Son” *The White Album* (EMI Records Ltd., 1968)
50 The Beatles, “Dear Prudence”
51 Turner 153.
52 *Anthology* 171.
imperial culture that the youth of the sixties were trying to reject. Especially with the United States’ involvement in Vietnam, anti-war sentiments were very strong amongst the counter-culture youth at this time. The Beatles were very supportive of this sentiment. Paul McCartney once said, “We weren’t into prejudice”—as if it were some kind of passing fad of his parent’s generation that could simply be shaken off.53

The foundation for the Beatles’ support of pacifism came from an Indian influence, Maharesi Mahesh Yogi, under whom the boys studied transcendental meditation in India. One of his mottos was, “…love is the force of life, powerful and sublime. The flower of life blooms in love and radiates all around.”54 In 1967, not too long after their return from India, John Lennon wrote “All You Need is Love,” which was very reflective of the values that they learned from the Mahareshi. That year, there was a BBC Live television special entitled One World that was broadcast across thirty-three networks world-wide. Each country that participated got a five-minute segment to represent its culture to 300 million sets of eyes watching across the globe. Naturally, the Beatles were chosen to represent Great Britain because they were, after all, the most powerful voice in the nation at that time. They chose to sing “All You Need is Love” for their five-minute segment, which was, indeed, representative of the counter-culture of Britain—but ironically, it was also in a way representative of the Empire because its message came from the roots of Indian culture.55

The Beatles also showed their pacifist sentiments through means of protest. Because they knew that their voices were much stronger than those of others involved in the youth movement, the Fab Four made sure to voice their displeasure with conditions in

53 Anthology 226.
54 Anthology 260.
55 Spitz 700.
Great Britain that were still tainted by imperialism. For example, the Beatles refused to play in any country that still enforced racial segregation. As a result of this, their records were banned in the country of South Africa, where the practice of apartheid was law.\textsuperscript{56}

Another drastic measure of protest came from John Lennon in 1969 when he returned his Member of the British Empire award due to the crisis in Biafra. He commented, “It was hypocritical for me to accept it, but I’m glad, really, that I did—because it meant that four years later I could use it to make a gesture.”\textsuperscript{57} This gesture strengthened the movement of the counter-culture and continued the tone of the “Summer of Love” in 1967.

Eastern culture was also used by the counter-culture to undermine the religious sentiments of the imperial generation. The Christianity that had been forced upon indigenous people all throughout the Empire was not supported by British youth during the sixties. They did not sign on to the evangelical humanitarianism that had previously been acceptable because of the belief that Christianity was superior to other religions. John Lennon believed that all religions were the same and it was only the end achievement of spiritual transcendence that really mattered.

In making an observation on how the youth of Great Britain no longer felt a connection with Christianity, Lennon commented, quite controversially, “Christianity will go. It will vanish and shrink. I needn’t argue about that…We’re more popular than Jesus now.”\textsuperscript{58} This comment was met by the fury of conservative members of British society because it was received as John Lennon comparing his own power to the power of Jesus Christ. This was not his intention, but it was evident from this incident that the

\textsuperscript{56} Anthology 226.
\textsuperscript{57} Anthology 181.
\textsuperscript{58} Anthology 223.
British establishment felt very threatened by the counter-culture movement and by the influence of the Beatles.

The Beatles knew that the youth of the sixties were unimpressed with the Christian tradition because they were part of it and they felt it. Often times, when the boys were commenting on the youth culture, they were really speaking for themselves and their own feelings. Lennon once said, “The youth of today are really looking for some answers—for proper answers that the established church can’t give them, their parents can’t give them, material things can’t give them.” These answers that they were in such desperate need of could be found in Eastern spirituality. The Beatles all said that if they would have found transcendental meditation before they had experimented with LSD, they never would have had to take the drugs in the first place—because the two fostered such similar feelings of euphoria. Christianity certainly did not arouse this sense of inner peace.

George Harrison was the authority in the area of religion because he was the only one of the four Beatles to maintain a spiritual lifestyle until his death. In his opinion, “...a lot of bad things happened in the name of the church and in the name of Christ” and “Young people [were just] searching for a bit of peace inside themselves.” George was particularly not fond of the way the Christian church seemed to feel the need to exert its authority over its subjects. He said, “The whole ‘Christian’ attitude seemed to be telling you to believe what they’re telling you and not to have the direct experience.” In other words, he thought that Christianity was just another means of control over the masses and many young people in Great Britain agreed with this notion. In defense of his

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59 *Anthology* 260.
60 *Anthology* 226.
61 *Anthology* 233.
controversial Jesus comment, John Lennon said, “If Jesus being more popular means
more control….I’d sooner see they all follow us, even if it’s just to dance and sing for the
rest of their lives.”

This attitude contributed greatly to the admiration of Eastern spirituality and its
motto of “We are all God.” This motto was reflective of everything the counter-culture
was trying to work toward: acceptance of all people, regardless of race or class—which
was the complete opposite of what their imperial parents believed in. The counter-culture
wanted to emphasize the beauty of the individual while still celebrating the incredible
connection among humans, animals, the earth, and God. George Harrison said, “In our
society [as opposed to Eastern society], we tend, in a subtle way, to number ourselves and
each other, and the government does so, too.” On *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club
Band*, Harrison wrote an influential song that not only featured the sitar, but was about
the main ideas of Indian spirituality. “Within You Without You” talks about “the love
that’s gone so cold” and “the people who gain the world and lose their souls.” Harrison
knew how to use his position of influence to expose Britain to his spiritual beliefs: “And
the time will come when you will see we’re all one…and to see you’re really only very
small/ and life flows on within you and without you.”

In the case of the Mahareshi Mahesh Yogi, his spiritual community was so
attractive to the Beatles and to the counter-culture because it was so heavily geared
toward the common person and the idea of communion. There was no attitude of
superiority or control like there was in Christianity. John Lennon particularly liked that

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62 Anthology 225.
63 Anthology 234.
64 The Beatles, “Within You Without You” *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* (EMI Records
Ltd., 1967).
monetarily, one only had to give one week’s pay to the Mahareshi’s spiritual community in order to join for life, whatever the amount may be. “I think it’s the fairest thing I’ve ever heard of”, he said.”\(^\text{65}\) As expressed in their song “Revolution 1”, the Beatles did not condone giving “money for people with minds that hate.”\(^\text{66}\) “Going native” was considered a humble thing to do amongst the youth culture of the 1960s.

While the counter-culture of the 1960s may have had good intentions in “going native,” in reality, it was as guilty of imperial attitudes as their parents were. In their utter admiration for Eastern cultures, the Beatles were essentializing Easterners in a positive light just as their parents and grandparents had essentialized them negatively thirty years prior. While rebelling against racism and denouncing the culture of imperialism, the counter-culture a different kind of racist imperial culture. This observation only further disproves Porter’s point that there was no effective imperial legacy. If the most rebellious members of British society in the sixties were still being weighted down by the imperial culture, how can one say that British culture was not affected by empire?

In 1968, after the Mahareshi Mahesh Yogi was accused of seducing a young female student in his ashram, John Lennon felt personally wounded by the hypocrisy of the situation and became very disenchanted with Eastern spirituality almost immediately. The song “Sexy Sadie” was originally written with the Mahareshi’s name and focuses on the negative power of sexuality. Fans could almost feel Lennon’s pain as he sang, “One sunny day, the world was waiting for a lover/ She came along to turn on everyone…Sexy Sadie, what have you done?/ You’ve made a fool of everyone/ You’ll get yours, however

\(^\text{65}\) Anthology 261.

big your think you are.” Lennon signed on to the imperial notion that Indians were very sexually-charged polygamists who were dirty and immoral.

The idea of “essentializing the Other” became a very popular criticism in the field of history. In 1978, an literature professor named Edward Said launched an attack on the West’s representation of the Orient in his widely influential book, Orientalism. He claimed that “all European orientalists of the colonial period were consciously or unconsciously complicit in the aims of European colonialism.” In other words, he thought that even Europeans in the 1800s who admired Eastern culture and respected nature were racists and bigots. Edward Said was calling out the people of the West who professed to admire the East—because they were still essentially viewing Easterners as “the Other”.

Said would definitely consider the youth of the counter-culture orientalists because they assumed that all peoples of Eastern cultures are simple, alike, and unchanging. This is blatantly untrue of India, which was not exactly full of gurus who walked around preaching peace and harmony like the Beatles were implying. The people of India wanted to modernize just as much as the rest of the world and it was misleading for the Beatles to convey otherwise—and essentializing for the counter-culture to disregard it. Edward Said would have agreed that “whatever the individual goodwill of the scholars, they are all prisoners of the establishment—which, in turn, depends on propagating the old racist myths of European Orientalism in order to further the Western

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imperial domination of the East. This statement applies to how the Beatles reacted to Eastern cultures even though they were admiring it. It does not matter that the counter-culture was trying to move away from imperialist attitudes, Britons were still prisoners of the Empire and were still guilty of “essentializing the Other”.

In summation, not even the counter-culture of Great Britain could throw off the dead weight of its imperial past because that is how deeply the Empire had permeated British culture—and still continues to permeate it today. Not even the most rebellious of cultural movements could actually shake off years and years of engraved imperialistic attitudes even when it had deliberately tried to do so. For Bernard Porter to overlook this blatant fact is an utter disservice to the agency and value of the peripheral cultures and also to the importance and magnitude of an entire century of British history.

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