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**“WHERE WERE YOU WHILE WE WERE GETTING HIGH?”:
HOW MANCHESTER BECAME THE REPUBLIK OF MANCUNIA**

Colin Damms

Manchester, once the center of Britain's industrial revolution, had become a shell of its former self by the 1970s. The outsourcing of industry and aging manufacturing in Manchester had left the city and its residents without an identity. The politics of the time also contributed to this feeling of lost identity in Manchester. The working class felt disenfranchised by the Tory government under Margaret Thatcher and John Major. There were several policies and laws enacted by the Tories that were unpopular amongst labourers, particularly Mancunians.

The absence of culture in Manchester contributed to this lack of identity. Pop music and pop culture were being imported from the United States, and even the main British musical acts were not based in or from Manchester. Additionally, in Football, Manchester had fallen behind rivals Liverpool and other clubs from the south of England. The talent was not being produced or raised in Manchester.

This research paper discusses how Manchester redefined its identity through culture in the 1980s and 1990s, particularly through music and football, and ignited a revival of culture throughout Britain, a culture embraced by the New Labour political movement in the 1990s.

I. Manchester and Industry

Manchester, England was a relatively unremarkable town until the 18th century. The introduction of textile production in the area was the beginning of an incredible period of growth for the city, and by the 19th century, the city and surrounding towns had become a major urban center. Manchester had become the hub for textile production in Britain, and the resulting expansion of industry turned the city into an industrial boom town. Factories in Manchester, equipped with the most modern equipment and machinery, were able to convert raw material into yarn and cloth and export them via canal or river to the nearby port of Liverpool, where they

could be shipped all over the world. Manchester had become a dominant and important industrial city.¹

With the rapid expansion of the city and its population came increased political tension in the region. The working class demanded better compensation and conditions for their work; in Manchester, political activists capitalized on working-class support for such change. Social philosopher Friederich Engels, the co-author of “The Communist Manifesto”, lived and worked in Manchester, and wrote down much of what he saw in his book “*The Condition of the Working Class in England.*”² The cry for workers' rights and political unrest led to many reforms in Parliament, and the Labour Party, now one of the two main political parties in British politics, was founded for the purpose of defending and furthering the rights of British workers. The roots of the Labour Party are firmly planted in the city of Manchester, and many Mancunians are proud of the contributions the city has made not only to Britain's economy but also its political and social progress.

Up through the early 20th century, Manchester had remained one of Britain’s most important economic centers, but economic downturn following the First World War and the Great Depression hit Manchester hard. The city suffered from economic depression, but also from the loss of labour due to advancements in the textile industry that sent production elsewhere. Throughout the depression and post-World War II era, Manchester’s population and jobs continued to decline: the city lost over 100,000 jobs between 1960 and 1983.³ Britain began to turn towards more conservative politics, and many blamed the working class for the national economic downturn in the 1970s. Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative party defeated the

¹ Hall, Peter (1998). "The first industrial city: Manchester 1760–1830". *Cities in Civilisation*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

² Engels, Friedrich, and V. G. Kiernan. *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1987.

³ Kidd, Alan (2006). *Manchester: A History*. Lancaster: Carnegie Publishing. pp. 12, 15–24, 224.

Labour Party in the 1979 general election and began to implement policies that weakened labour unions and the working classes' political power. Mancunians continued to suffer from unemployment under Thatcher and were desperate for a new identity after the city had slipped into irrelevance over the course of the 20th century.

II. Mancunian Identity in Music

Music emerged as a way for Mancunians to voice their frustrations. The identity crisis in Manchester was deeper than the general political vexation engulfing Britain at the time. Mancunians were not just frustrated politically; they had no cultural life to fall back on. This problem was addressed through music with the emergence of successful Mancunian acts. The punk movement that began in the mid-1970s was a platform for young Britons to express their anger with politics. For Mancunians, it was a vehicle for redefinition as well.

In studying Mancunian music, it is imperative to include analysis of the lyrics as well as the overall tone of the music and delivery of the lyrics. The music and lyrics are important to understanding the context of the music. The band Joy Division is an excellent example of this. Joy Division was founded in Manchester in the late 1970s, and their sound helped establish a new, distinctly Mancunian sound. The band's music was more dark and mysterious than that to which the English mainstream was accustomed, but there was an immediate buzz surrounding the band, and they quickly became synonymous with their hometown.

The band's first record, "Unknown Pleasures," produced and recorded in The Factory, a former industrial era building in Manchester that had been converted into a recording studio, sounds itself as though it was produced on an assembly line in the old industrial center. The tracks are carefully assembled, and the band's sound contributes to the industrial tone through the complimenting parts of the different instruments. The opening track on the album,

“Disorder,” opens by bringing together isolated parts one-by-one. The drums come in first, then bass, electric guitar, and finally the vocals. This isolation of parts is accentuated by the sense of isolation in the lyrics. Ian Curtis, songwriter and vocalist, sings of his own “disorder(s)” and struggles with epilepsy, anxiety, and depression. Perhaps the most significant lyrics are the final words of the song. Curtis sings, “I’ve got the spirit, but losing feeling.”⁴ The “spirit, but losing feeling” resonated with the Mancunians who had seen their city lose its identity. His inflection can be seen as depressing, but, more accurately, his voice is very real. It is easy to read the pain in Curtis’ voice as he sings about his mental health, and the darker side of human emotion rarely expressed publicly.

The Mancunian connection with Joy Division was studied by Vassar College Sociologist Leonard Nevarez in “How Joy Division Came to Sound Like Manchester: Myth and Ways of Listening in the Neoliberal City.”⁵ Nevarez argues that while Joy Division may not have actually been the sum of everything that was Manchester at the time, in retrospect, the fans and music industry looked at Joy Division as an aesthetically sensible representation of Manchester in the minds of Mancunians. In his study, he uses two music journalists’ opinions of the time to illustrate the “myth” surrounding Joy Division: Paul Morley and Jon Savage.

In contrast to Paul Morley’s idiosyncratic, hallucinatory vision, Savage’s writings on Joy Division asserted that the band’s music mirrored the actual dark spaces and empty places of Manchester and other British cities.... It’s like collectively [Joy Division] relayed the aura of Manchester in that period. They are what Manchester was like. (Naylor, quoted in Gee) It was almost like a science-fiction interpretation of Manchester. You could recognize the landscape and the mindscape and the soundscape as being Manchester. It

⁴ Curtis, Ian, *Unknown Pleasures*. Joy Division, Factory Records, Album, 1979.

⁵ Nevarez, Leonard. 2013. "How Joy Division Came to Sound Like Manchester: Myth and Ways of Listening in the Neoliberal City." *Journal Of Popular Music Studies* 25, no. 1: 56-76. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed October 25, 2016).

was extraordinary that they managed to make Manchester international, if you like—make Manchester cosmic.⁶

Nevarez describes Savage's reaction to the music as a vivid visual interpretation of Ian Curtis' lyrics infused with the dark and mysterious tone of the instrumentals. He sees places in Manchester and the surrounding towns and suburbs. He feels the presence of the city in the air around him. Savage, however, feels the dark emptiness of industrial Manchester.

In his 1979 album review, Savage gives a more in-depth analysis of the album "Unknown Pleasures," saying:

To the centre of the city in the night waiting for you...'
Joy Division's spatial, circular themes and Martin Hannett's shiny, waking-dream production gloss are one perfect reflection of Manchester's dark spaces and empty places: endless sodium lights and hidden semis seen from a speeding car, vacant industrial sites - the endless detritus of the 19th century - seen gaping like rotten teeth from an orange bus. Hulme seen from the fifth floor on a threatening, rainy day... This is not, specifically, to glamourise; it could be anywhere. Manchester, as a (if not *the* city of the Industrial Revolution, happens only to be a more obvious example of decay and malaise.⁷

Manchester is also the obvious choice given the location of the recording studio at Factory Records. This literary analysis by Savage romanticizes the music of Joy Division and gives the feeling that the music is more significant in its time than perhaps it is perceived to be. Savage also romanticizes the emptiness of Manchester, and, as a native Mancunian himself, his perspective has been significant amongst music journalists, as the album obviously appeals to him on a personal level.

⁶ Nevarez, Leonard. 2013. "How Joy Division Came to Sound Like Manchester: Myth and Ways of Listening in the Neoliberal City." *Journal Of Popular Music Studies* 25, no. 1: 56-76. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed October 25, 2016).

⁷ Savage, Jon, "Joy Division: Unknown Pleasures Album Review," *Melody Maker*. 1979.

Nevarez also discusses the relevance to Manchester bands like Joy Division as opposed to other Mancunian bands of the time, such as the Buzzcocks⁸, who found their success largely in London, where the punk movement was based at the time. Nevarez indicates that the aesthetic appeal of Joy Division to Mancunians was that rather than becoming a mainstream success in London like every other band that makes it, Joy Division was largely true to its roots. Fans could only listen to Joy Division on a few radio stations across the country, but in the Mancunian music scene, the band was ever present. They were incredibly accessible to their Mancunian fanbase, even allowing fans access to their rehearsals and recording sessions at The Factory.⁹The band's popularity would eventually spread throughout Britain and overseas, but not until after the death of Curtis.

Curtis suffered greatly from anxiety, epilepsy, and depression, which led to his suicide in 1980 on the eve of Joy Division's first US tour. The remaining band members reformed as New Order shortly after Curtis' death and a new generation of bands arose in Manchester following the lead of Joy Division. The Smiths were one of these bands.

Led by the songwriting duo of guitarist Johnny Marr and vocalist Morrissey, The Smiths quickly became an anti-establishment sensation in independent, or indie, music. Eye-catching titles such as "Meat is Murder" and "The Queen is Dead" reflected the band's blunt style, and their rapid success gave mainstream voice to those who were unhappy with the changes brought about by Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative majority. One song, in particular, stands out, the single "Panic," released in 1986, attacks the state of Britain culturally under Thatcher. It

⁸ Nevarez, Leonard. 2013. "How Joy Division Came to Sound Like Manchester: Myth and Ways of Listening in the Neoliberal City." *Journal Of Popular Music Studies* 25, no. 1: 56-76. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed October 25, 2016).

⁹ Booth, Hannah, "Joy Division weren't cold. They were down-to-earth and funny," *The Guardian*, Accessed June 23, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/jun/23/joy-division-kevin-cummins-photograph-august-1979>.

directly targets BBC Radio 1 DJ Steven Wright with the lyrics “Hang the blessed DJ, because the music he constantly plays, it says nothing to me about my life.”¹⁰

Despite their short-lived career as a band, The Smiths became one of the most influential indie bands of all time. In 2002, the magazine *New Musical Express (NME)* named them the most influential band of all time. Music journalist Simon Goddard has argued that they are one of the most important guitar bands of the 80s, able to “achieve mainstream success on their own terms.”¹¹ Being on “their own terms” was an attitude Mancunians identified with, and was a tradition continued by Mancunian bands of the 1990s, in particular, The Stone Roses and Oasis.

The Stone Roses, another Mancunian band that achieved success on their own terms as an indie group in the late 1980s, often seen as one of the first Britpop bands, achieved breakthrough success in 1989 with their first, self-titled studio album. They performed at Spike Island in 1990 in front of some 27,000 people, and while the show was initially considered a failure due to the poor sound quality caused by wind, the show has become somewhat of a legend for its atmosphere and the lasting effect it has had on British music. Noel Gallagher of Oasis identified The Stone Roses show at Spike Island as the foundation for the success of his band, but also the movement that would eventually take place across all British Music:

It was a shit gig, but it was a fantastic... from a technical point of view, the wind was blowing the sound all over fucking the place. I don't think I got to hear one of the songs properly, but that wasn't the point. The point was that there was all them [sic] people there. Spike Island, that was the blueprint for my group, who were then going to become the biggest band in the world. The Stone Roses, their impact, and that gig, stretches so far beyond the gig itself and the music. The Stone Roses need never have played a note at that gig. The job was already done when the people were there, d'you know what I mean.¹²

¹⁰ Morrissey, *Panic*, The Smiths, Rough Trade Records, Single, 1986.

¹¹ Simon Goddard. "The Last Days of the Smiths/The Last Rites," *Q Magazine*. No. 250, May 2007.

¹² Dower, John. *Live Forever: The Rise and Fall of Brit Pop*. Interview with Noel Gallagher. DVD. Directed by John Dower. London: BBC, 2003.

Noel Gallagher points out the sheer size of the crowd as the main takeaway from the Spike Island show. Despite the technical setbacks the show was a massive success and was an iconic moment for the Mancunian music scene.

Jon Savage goes on to say that despite the success of The Stone Roses, and their show at Spike Island, there was not an immediate shift in the music culture of Britain. According to Savage, The Stone Roses “totally fucked it up” and “lost their nerve” about the same time that Nirvana and other American grunge bands spread to Britain and dominated popular rock music. However, this did not stop the development of a new type of British sound, a sound inspired by Joy Division, The Smiths, and The Stone Roses.

It is clear from Spike Island that young Mancunians were hungry for a new sound, one that they identified with, not an imported American sound. What can be seen throughout British culture in the 1990s is a trend of nationalist pride in culture. Even New Labour’s campaign ad for Tony Blair fed this idea of Britain finding its own way again after seventeen years of a Tory government. The success of British pop culture globally in the late 1990s reflects the attitude that resonated with Mancunians so much in the 1980s: finding success on their own terms amidst a wave of unidentifiable pop culture. Joy Division, The Smiths, The Stone Roses, and most of all Oasis did the same in music. By the end of the 1980s, the gritty Mancunian aesthetic appeared to have spread throughout British society, along with the gritty determination to rediscover a British identity amidst waves of music and culture that said nothing to them about their lives. This early success of Joy Division, The Smiths, and The Stone Roses paved the way for the most successfully Mancunian band yet, Oasis.

Oasis formed in 1991 in Manchester, and though they had to travel for many of their shows - in some cases as far as Scotland - they found a devout following in Manchester and had

access to many local venues.¹³ The band achieved major commercial success in 1994 with “Definitely Maybe,” the fastest-selling British debut album in history. Despite several fights between bandmates, particularly between brothers Liam and Noel Gallagher, the band remained together throughout a world tour and produced their sophomore album, “What’s The Story? (Morning Glory),” in 1995, an album praised universally by fans and critics alike.¹⁴ Their cultural relevance had grown rapidly, and their influence in the media and politics was growing rapidly as well. Noel Gallagher, in particular, made a name for himself in politics through his songwriting and public image.

While most Oasis songs are not directly political, there are certainly political tones relevant to the times in a few of their songs. 1994’s “Up in the Sky” has an upbeat tone paired with aggressive lyrics targeting anyone whose social status set them up above the rest or the establishment in general: “Hey you! Wearing the crown Making no sound I heard you feel down Well that's just too bad Welcome to my world”¹⁵ This verse is most likely directed at the conservative government that had been in place for nearly fourteen years when the song was written. “We were on the dole at the time under Conservative rule,” Noel Gallagher said, “it’s about establishment figures, who didn’t have a clue about how people were really living in England at the time and what they’d done to the country.” While most of their debut album is seen as a reflection of an apathetic attitude, the political activism of Noel Gallagher is still visible in much of his writing.

Noel Gallagher was the primary songwriter for Oasis, though he was not a regular singer until the second and third albums. Noel Gallagher, a very honest and direct speaker, came to national attention multiple times for his views on social issues, particularly drugs. Youth culture

¹³ Whitecross, Mat, *Supersonic*, DVD, Directed by Mat Whitecross, UK: Mint Pictures, 2016.

¹⁴ Whitecross, Mat, *Supersonic*, DVD, Directed by Mat Whitecross, UK: Mint Pictures, 2016.

¹⁵ Gallagher, Noel, *Definitely Maybe*, Columbia Records, 1994.

in Britain bought into the emerging drug culture of the 1980s, and by 1995 it was estimated over half of young Britons had tried drugs at least once. Noel Gallagher spoke to the press in defense of a fellow musician sacked for talking about using ecstasy. He called the anti-drug government hypocritical, and pointed out how common drug use had become in Britain:

"As soon as people realise that the majority of people in this country take drugs, then the better off we'll all be. It's not like a scandalous sensation, or anything like that. Not when you've got our Government selling arms to people who go out and kill probably relatives of somebody in this room. Drugs is like getting up and having a cup of tea in the morning."¹⁶

Controversial as it was, Gallagher had a point. He made the statement to take aim at the politicians and media he viewed as hypocritical, but he also pointed out that drugs were much more commonplace than suggested by their coverage in politics and on the news. Gallagher was a big part of the drug culture. Despite the supposed war on drugs under Thatcher, drugs had become culturally relevant in all social classes and were a huge part of the music movement itself. A music movement that would eventually be embraced by politicians of the Labour Party's New Labour movement.

The music scene wasn't alone in this either. Football, like rock and roll, was typically seen as a working-class form of entertainment. British football fans were notorious for causing public disturbances and even rioting at times. It was no mistake that Manchester was host to one of the most successful teams in football, Manchester United. Though the 1970s and 1980s were not kind to the club, United's devout fanbase was rewarded with a resurgent team in the 1990s comprised largely of Mancunian talent. That United team would help give English football's reputation a much-needed makeover.

III. Mancunian Football

¹⁶ "Drugs are like a cup of tea, says Noel," *Independent*, Jan. 30, 1997. Accessed June 18, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/drugs-are-like-a-cup-of-tea-says-noel-1285833.html>.

Though Manchester United had a proud and storied history, like the city of Manchester itself the club's golden years seemed to be behind them by the 1980s. Sir Matt Busby, the club's most successful manager at the time, retired in 1970 after winning nearly every trophy there was to win, including the European Cup, making Manchester United the first English side to win the competition.¹⁷ Mancunian native and star player Sir Bobby Charlton retired soon after. This was the beginning of a rapid decline that saw the club relegated to the second division of English football, a humiliating demotion for such a prestigious club. Even though they gained promotion the next season they failed to fully recover for several seasons.¹⁸ This shocking downturn left the club's fans as stunned as rest of the football world. To make it worse for them, the new club at the top of English football was their fiercest rival in football and regionally, Liverpool.

Liverpool had a firm claim on the "greatest English club" title, and in 1990 they won their 18th league title, a record that nobody could imagine besting at the time. However, since the inception of the Premier League, Manchester United has won 13 league titles, which in addition to the seven they had won previously, brought their total to 20. "My greatest challenge is not what's happening at the moment," Ferguson once said. "My greatest challenge was knocking Liverpool right off their fucking perch. And you can print that."¹⁹ This quote expresses Ferguson's personal satisfaction with taking United back to the top of the footballing world, but also the attitude of the red half of Manchester, who had lost their footballing identity for nearly two and a half decades. The rivalry between the two industrial hubs of the northwest takes to the pitch at least twice a year in the Premier League, and Mancunians, who were sick of losing to

¹⁷ Murphy, Alex. *The Official Illustrated History of Manchester United*. London, UK: Orion Publishing Group. 2008.

¹⁸ Murphy, Alex. *The Official Illustrated History of Manchester United*. London, UK: Orion Publishing Group. 2008.

¹⁹ "Sir Alex Ferguson Best Quotes," *The Guardian*, May 2013, Accessed November, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2013/may/08/sir-alex-ferguson-best-quotes>.

Liverpool - or the “Scousers” as they were often called - reveled in the newfound success of Manchester United in the 1990s. They reclaimed the title of most successful English club and became relevant on the European stage once again.²⁰

English football had often been marred by the violence and destructiveness of English fans. The 1980s and early 1990s were quite humbling for an English club and national team supporter, who saw the football authorities finally punish their beloved teams for their behavior. Following the Heysel Stadium disaster in 1985, the Union of European Football Associations banned all English clubs indefinitely from participating in European club competitions, notably the European Cup, the major prize of European club football that English clubs had dominated in previous seasons.

The indefinite length of the ban ended up being 5 seasons, but by the time clubs returned to the European stage, the quality of the opposition had increased tremendously. Thus, as the climate of Europe became more united politically, English football suffered embarrassing defeats in club competitions and in international competition. England crashed out of the Euro 92 without a single win and failed to even qualify for the 1994 World Cup. England missing the World Cup was a national embarrassment. That’s why it was such an extravagant occasion when England hosted the Euro in 1996, and why United’s success in the European Cup - now rebranded as the UEFA Champions League - was so important to English football. Manchester United’s prominence and newly revitalized stadium at Old Trafford made them one of the host venues as well.

United dominated the 1990s in the English Premier League and FA Cup, winning 5 league titles and 4 FA Cup titles, but the crowning achievement for the club was the 1998-99

²⁰ Murphy, Alex. *The Official Illustrated History of Manchester United*. London, UK: Orion Publishing Group. 2008.

Treble-winning season. The Treble, league, domestic cup, and Champions League all in one season was a feat no other English club had yet accomplished. United's Champions League win was also the first time an English side had won the competition since the European competitions ban enforced in 1985. Ferguson's team won against German side Bayern Munich and fielded a team that featured 5 homegrown Mancunian players.

Ferguson was known to give youth footballers a chance in the first team, and Manchester United's youth academy produced many starters and first-team regulars, including several notable players such as the Class of 92: David Beckham, Nicky Butt, Paul Scholes, Gary Neville, Phil Neville, and Ryan Giggs.²¹ This strategy of relying on a strong youth system was beneficial in building a self-sustainable team, but, more importantly to the fans, the youth system has produced several homegrown talents into the first-team. In modern football, it is rare to see local talent make it at the highest level, but since the arrival of Ferguson, Manchester United has produced several Mancunian players, even if they do not stay in Manchester for their entire careers.

David Beckham is particularly interesting to this research project because of his personal brand as well as his Mancunian roots. He became a cultural icon of Britain in his rise to fame and changed the way that football stars are viewed globally. Global marketing of the English Premier League and World Cup meant that more people than ever before were able to watch him play, and, as one of the first superstars of the Premier League, Beckham became the face of more than just English football. He became an icon synonymous with England around the world.²² Tony Blair once uttered his name in a desperate attempt to connect with a group of students in Japan,

²¹ Murphy, Alex. *The Official Illustrated History of Manchester United*. London, UK: Orion Publishing Group. 2008.

²² Pearlman, Leo, *The Class of 92*. David Beckham. DVD. Directed by Ben and Gabe Turner. London: F73 Productions, 2013.

and they immediately drew the connection with Britain.²³ Beckham's stardom and the brevity of his rise to fame are indicative of the new platform Manchester United had reached, and thus the influence that the club and its supporters had on the global game.

IV. Manchester, Britpop, and Cool Britannia

Manchester's influence beyond music and football became part of an even bigger movement in British culture. The Smiths and The Stone Roses sent a pulse through British music. They each achieved success independently, and of their own accord, and the rest of Britain had begun to take notice. Soon there were not just bands throughout England discovering their own sound, but there were also journalists searching for them, searching for a new sound that Britons could personally identify with. British music journalists embraced this new movement, something evident in the source material, particularly in music magazines. *New Music Express (NME)*, *Select*, and *Vanity Fair* are three examples of magazines whose material embraced the newfound British sound. Indeed, the music press played an important role in the continued success of these new bands, and an important part of this project is mapping the wider influence of music journalism that embraced a Mancunian culture in the 1990s.

In the April 1993 issue of *Select Magazine*, Suede frontman Brett Anderson was featured with a Union Jack flag backdrop, and the words "Yanks go home". The issue had features on bands Suede, St. Etienne, Denim, Pulp, and The Auteurs, all up and coming British bands that the magazine had identified as part of a new wave of British culture. Suede, in particular, had become an upstart success, and their style was nostalgic. They embraced classic glam rock, and their image certainly reflected their sound. They were reminiscent of the 1970s glam movement spearheaded by Mark Bolan and T. Rex, but with a modern sound that appealed to a younger

²³ Pearlman, Leo, *The Class of 92*. Interview with Tony Blair. DVD. Directed by Ben and Gabe Turner. London: F73 Productions, 2013.

audience and they were not alone. Joy Division and The Smiths were more original, in the sense that they were exploring a new genre of alternative rock style. Oasis and the Stone Roses, on the other hand, had a sound and style reminiscent of the British invasion of the 1960s. The Stone Roses represented a revival of psychedelic English rock music. They were an instant hit amongst the youth in Manchester who were coming of age in the late 80s and early 90s. Their demeanor was equally reflective of the psychedelic rock and drug culture.

The imagery of the Union Jack and British nationalism was a major step away from conservatism despite its controversial past. Once a symbol used by white nationalists, the Union Jack was reclaimed by British musicians and fashion icons. It aligned this new wave of style and culture with the British identity, and the imagery would be used in the Cool Britannia issue of *Vanity Fair* magazine in 1997.

Oasis, the Mancunian sensation and undisputed kings of Britpop, had released three consecutive number one albums by 1997, and Liam Gallagher, the lead singer, and brother of Noel Gallagher, had become notorious as one of Britain's new bad boys of rock and roll. He and his brother were never afraid of expressing their opinion or appearing in the tabloids. The magazine cover for *Vanity Fair*'s Cool Britannia issue seemed to not only be a statement of intent by British culture, but also a sexualized memory of the '60s in Britain. The cover features Liam Gallagher and actress Patsy Kensit, Gallagher's then wife, lying in a Union Jack bed in their underwear with the caption "London Swings Again."²⁴ It is a clear throwback to the art, music, and fashion of the 1960s. The magazine cover suggests a reclamation project to restore British culture to its former global significance, a new wave of the British invasion. The ones staking their claim as the face of this new wave were Liam and Noel Gallagher, two working-

²⁴ "London Swings Again!" *Vanity Fair* magazine cover. 1997.

class Mancunians who achieved stardom in all their gritty and unapologetic glory. The *Vanity Fair* cover made it clear that Oasis were the flagship band of Cool Britannia.

The NME “Blur vs Oasis” issue mimicking the style of a boxing match poster, helped spark a chart war between the two biggest bands in Britain at the time, Blur and Oasis. What happened became more than just a chart war, but a tabloid-fueled class war between a middle-class suburban band from Colchester, and the industrial working-class champions from Manchester. The Mancunian background of Oasis made them the obvious choice for representing the working class in the music scene, but what is more significant is the irony of it all. Both bands, but in particular Oasis, had made a name for themselves by criticizing the state of British society, and now they were selling themselves to the mainstream in a chart war designed by record labels and music media. The Mancunian working class aesthetic was in the mainstream, but in many ways, it was selling itself in the very image it had once criticized so heavily.

The idea of class war or class competition is not new in British culture. A working-class identity was deeply rooted in Manchester, even in more modern circumstances. The members of Oasis were all from working-class families, and they didn’t change their attitudes to fit the classic pop star image. The Gallagher brothers were raised in a council estate by their single mother. They were direct and profane in their speech, and their thick Mancunian accents were anything but posh. While Oasis may have participated in a “class war” created for the media hype, they remained authentic to their Mancunian roots in speech and class perspective. This new mainstream movement of working-class culture even made its way into politics.

The cultural transformation of Manchester into a hotbed of pop culture did not go unnoticed by politicians. This desire for a new wave of culture and society is evident from

interviews and publications, music journalists, and, perhaps most significantly, the rise of New Labour under Tony Blair. Mancunians were excited about more than just Oasis and Manchester United in the 90s, as were many Britons, and the Labour Party took advantage of that. Alastair Campbell, Tony Blair's Downing Street Press Secretary, acknowledged the close ties between football and the rise of New Labour, especially the close ties between Manchester United and New Labour. Campbell wrote:

It was no doubt in part my passion for sport that made me so keen on the New Labour-New Football alignment, but the real backdrop for it was the growth of the Premier League as a global media phenomenon, and the pre-eminence of Manchester United, led by their Labour-supporting manager, then plain Mr. Alex Ferguson.²⁵

The connection was similar with Britpop music. Noel Gallagher of Oasis had been a major celebrity spokesperson during Blair's campaign and was even invited to 10 Downing Street as Blair's guest following Labour's victory in the general election. Suddenly cultural icons of music and football, areas once looked down on as enablers for hooliganism, became politically important to national political parties. This new connection between politics and culture was a bold move by Labour, which was desperate for a major victory, but it paid off, and Labour would remain in power until 2010.

V. Conclusion

Manchester serves as a successful case study of a post-industrial city re-defining its identity through culture in music and football. Mancunian music and football not only found success but directly influenced the revival of British culture in Britpop and Cool Britannia in the 1990s. So much so that Tony Blair and the New Labour movement embraced music and football culture, historically associated with hooliganism, and won the majority in 1997 for the first time

²⁵ Campbell, Alastair, "Alastair Campbell on Labour and Manchester United: how two winning machines broke down." *The Guardian*, accessed November 10, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jan/20/alastair-campbell-labour-manchester-united-how-two-winning-machines-broke-down>.

since 1979. This political move may have pointed out the hypocrisy of a culture born out of dissent and anti-establishment politics, but it shows the incredible influence that Mancunian culture had developed.

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