

## *Book Reviews*

well-balanced. It is a comprehensive account that avoids simplistic or myopic emphases. Ultimately, it achieves its stated aims of presenting an accessible account that reorients the reader's understanding of American history. It would serve well as a survey of American economic and diplomatic history in an undergraduate course.

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Millard, André. *Beatlemania: Technology, Business, and Teen Culture in Cold War America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012. 223 Pp.

One might ask why another book on the Beatles is necessary, or why such a book should be reviewed in an economic and business history journal. André Millard, the author of *Beatlemania: Technology, Business, and Teen Culture in Cold War America*, addresses such questions by arguing that the band's success was not just due to fact that they were incredibly talented musicians and songwriters. According to Millard, other usually overlooked elements were also crucial to their success, especially their ability to capitalize on changes in technology and the transatlantic networks already established by multinational entertainment businesses. This linked them to the mass consumer economy in postwar America and the largest, most affluent teen cohort in the world in the mid-1960s--white middle class teenage girls.

Millard organizes his book in an interesting manner. In the first two chapters he focuses on the significance of the vinyl record and the emergence of Beatlemania before devoting four chapters looking at crucial pre-1960s developments in England, such as the influence of American music and film on British youth culture, the social and economic conditions in the Beatles' hometown of Liverpool, and the British music craze known as "skiffle," which helped lay the foundation

for rock'n'roll in England. The last six chapters concentrate on an extended analysis of key elements of Beatlemania in the US.

The main focus of Millard's study is the social phenomenon known as Beatlemania--the special bond that developed between the Beatles and their fans. He rejects the argument made by many historians that this was primarily a psychological phenomenon. For example, David Szatmary argues in *Rockin' in Time* (2014, 8th ed.) that Beatlemania helped Americans overcome their depression after President Kennedy's assassination. Instead, Millard emphasizes the role played by select corporations in fostering Beatlemania that was, at its essence, "one of the largest and most successful merchandising campaigns in American history." (p. 23) Capitol Records played the key role in America. An affiliate of EMI, this British multinational music corporation had a licensing agreement to market English bands under contract with the parent company in the states. Though initially reluctant to promote the Beatles, Capitol finally decided to place their considerable resources behind a major promotional campaign, linking radio coverage, US tours, and television appearances. They invested large sums merchandising an incredible array of Beatles products such as photographs and wigs--the latter crucial to the group's "brand" image as "mop tops." In fact, the value of these Beatles trinkets surpassed the money earned from record sales and tours.

Millard argues that the Beatles's management--especially Brian Epstein--also played a key role in fostering Beatlemania. Epstein--an expert in "presentation" according to Millard--paid close attention to refining the Beatles "look" from the black leather jackets worn by the band in their early days--an image associated in the minds of many middle class adults with juvenile delinquency--to the fashionable "mod" clothing as they climbed the charts in England and later America. This new image worked at two levels, making the band more palatable to parents and attracting increasingly fashion-conscious young fans. Epstein's attention to image even went so far as to ask "the boys to cut off the ends of their guitar stings to make them look neater!" (p. 106)

Intense competition in the radio industry also played to the Beatles advantage. When the Beatles traveled from city to city during their US tours, radio stations vied for coverage. They wanted to be known as the

best Beatles station in their respective communities, so disk jockeys competed for interviews with the band. They also sought to build their reputation for being the first station to play advance copies of Beatles records. The Top 40 radio format--begun in the 1950s--also helped the band when their songs came to dominate the top slots, making it virtually impossible not to hear the group.

Technological developments, many with origins in the Second World War, also fostered Beatlemania. New sound technologies, such as tape recorders, RCA-Victor's 45 rpm record, and Columbia's 33 1/3 rpm record, allowed mass entertainment firms to produce a better quality product. For teens, new inexpensive transistor radios and record players--what Millard classifies as youth culture machines--enhanced consumption of the Beatles music. Also, international jet travel was crucial in allowing the Beatles to quickly and tirelessly cross the Atlantic so that they could tour the US and give their fans what they wanted most--seeing the band in person.

Certain elements of the Cold War also influenced the transatlantic movement of culture. Millard discusses how the presence of US Air Force bases and personnel in England served as conduits for the spread of American music and films, influencing many Brits including the Beatles. The key change here, according to Millard, was that the Beatles became the first British band to have a major effect on the US. Prior to the Beatles, popular culture usually travelled one way across the Atlantic, from the US to Britain. The band's sudden massive popularity led to the beginning of the British "invasion" of America. US record companies then sent talent scouts to England to look for the "next" Beatles. There was plenty of money to be made employing the tools of the trade.

Ultimately, timing was crucial to the Beatles success. In Chapter 9 ("Convergence"), Millard asserts that the "Beatles happened to be at the right place at the right time." (p. 137) This key point underlies the issue of contingency--a major concern of historians. Millard argues that if the Beatles had formed a couple years earlier or later, they may not have had the incredible effect that they did. The Beatles arrived at the same time that major social and economic transformations were occurring. They had the insight and ambition to sense these changes and to take advantage of them.

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André Millard's *Beatlemania* is representative of a small but growing number of studies that examine the business and economic aspects of rock'n'roll. Important works that incorporate this interpretive framework include Donald Mabry's 1990 study of Ace Records and John Jackson's 1997 analysis of Dick Clark in *American Bandstand*. The book would have benefitted from more endnotes to assist curious readers in exploring key topics in further detail. For example, the very interesting account of EMI trying to sell the Beatles' masters to various record companies in America before the band had become popular had no citations. EMI's efforts to sign a contract with major US firms such as Atlantic and Decca faltered, so they struck a deal with the minor Vee-Jay label--which produced few sales. Finally, Capitol exercised their option. This is one of several fascinating stories in the book that needed more development.

That said, this book has few weaknesses. It is well written, clearly argued, presents a different interpretation of a much-studied topic, and places the story into the broader historical context. The book also includes a few judiciously chosen photographs to help further illustrate key issues. The cover photo--of two young teenage girls enthralled by Beatlemania--beautifully captures the outward appearance of a phenomenon that was far more complex than many imagined.

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### Works Cited

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