

# TRANSITION FROM MYSTERY INTO HISTORY: HOW THE INTERNET REVIVED MY FAITH IN "SWINGING LONDON"

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## **Abstract**

*Journalists like to say that what they write is "the first rough draft of history." Although there is truth in this dictum, it ignores the fact that the original rough draft may be revised by later commentators. This paper discusses a controversial article about an equally controversial phenomenon: that phenomenon is "Swinging London," and article is the eponymous cover story about it which Time magazine published in April 1966. The author traces both the creation and reception of the article, and the changing perceptions of both phenomenon and article with the passage of nearly fifty years.*

*The paper admits that, as the author wrote the Time cover, she is an interested party; it will also suggest why her uniquely qualified views may still rate consideration in 2015. Following a brief introduction, this paper situates the cover story in the cultural and journalistic context of its period; next, it deals with the initial responses to it and the changing perceptions into the 21st century, and concludes with thoughts about why posterity has been kinder to Swinging London than the journalism of the 1960s.*

## **Keywords: Swinging London, Time magazine, journalism, cultural history**

Journalists like to say that what they write is "the first rough draft of history."<sup>1</sup> There is much truth to this claim, but it ignores how very substantially that original draft may be revised by subsequent commentators. This paper concerns a phenomenon that has undergone just such a revision as it has made the transition from being a topic for journalists to one of interest to historians. Its transition—and revision—can be dramatized and may in part even be attributed to the following facts: firstly, those who have written about it have evolved from being primarily journalists to being primarily scholars; secondly, the birthdates of these authors have evolved from earlier to later; and thirdly, publishers of books on the subject have evolved from being exclusively trade houses to being at least partly university presses and ultimately textbook publishers.

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<sup>1</sup>The phrase is usually attributed to Philip L. Graham, onetime president and publisher of the Washington Post, but a 2010 article in Slate cites an earlier source. See Jack Shafer, "Who Said It First?" *Slate*, posted August 30, 2010 at [http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/press\\_box/2010/08/who\\_said\\_it\\_first.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/press_box/2010/08/who_said_it_first.html). Accessed October 21, 2015.

The phenomenon I refer to was discussed in a magazine article whose name for it has passed so completely into the vernacular that most people hearing it today are unaware of its origins. Still less are they apt to be aware of the controversy originally surrounding both phenomenon and article, or the fact that, nearly fifty years after the article's publication, both phenomenon and article appear to fit—and fit more favorably—into a context that reflects how history itself is defined in the twenty-first century.

The phenomenon, which could only have happened in the 1960s, was and is known as “Swinging London.” The article about it was the cover story published by *Time* magazine in its issue dated April 15, 1966. Originally, this cover story was to be a travel feature in *Time*'s “back of the book,” where cultural and feature stories appeared. The London cover was intended to help *Time*'s less sophisticated—and perhaps older—readers plan summer vacations. Insiders, and many younger people, already knew that London was the place to go.

#### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In 1966 British pop musicians had lately become internationally famous, from the Beatles and Rolling Stones through the rest of what was known in the U.S. as “the British invasion.” Teen-aged boys all over the U.S. were growing their hair long, in imitation of John, Paul, George and Ringo. Other British performers whose fame had crossed the Atlantic included Sean Connery as the original suave James Bond, Julie Christie with an Oscar-winning role in “*Darling*” and the romantic lead in “*Dr. Zhivago*,” Peter O'Toole in “*Lawrence of Arabia*,” Albert Finney as the lusty hero of “*Tom Jones*” and Michael Caine, with his bedroom eyes, in “*The Ipcress File*.” Mary Quant, the dress designer, and Vidal Sassoon, the hair stylist, were likewise known in the U.S. as well as in the U.K.. The *New York Times* had mentioned the London scene with approval, and *Newsweek* had endorsed it as a hot tourist destination in 1965, but only when *Time*, a year later, called it “Swinging London” did the phrase stick.

In 1966 the Internet was decades in the future. Cable TV was in its infancy, and public television was still available only for educational institutions. TV and radio could and did handle headline news effectively, but for in-depth coverage of the news, and especially features, educated Americans still relied heavily on print—and on three major print news media in particular: *The Times* (then as now) was the gold standard; *Newsweek* was hip, liberal and already beginning to question the war in Vietnam; and *Time* was Republican, comparatively conservative, and still supporting the war. Both the news weeklies had national publications, but, to judge from their editorial slants, *Newsweek* was targeted more toward the Northwest Corridor and the West Coast—which since the 2000 Presidential elections have been known as the blue states—while *Time* was targeted more toward the Midwest and South, which are similarly known as the red states, or, as I was taught to call when I worked there, the heartland.

In the heartland, *Time* was beloved by readers whom people in New York and Washington DC might have considered square, but no tastemaker or national politician, even in those more enlightened parts of the country, could afford to ignore it. In fact, ever since I had been aware of it, *Time* was the magazine good liberals everywhere most loved to hate. Besides being very well written, in a terminally cocky style, and on top of most (if not all) of the big stories, its circulation was roughly four times that of the weekday *New York Times*, three times that of the Sunday *New York Times* and nearly twice that of *Newsweek*. Many people called *Time* “influential” (a barbed compliment at best, almost invariably implying that the person, place or thing so described not only has influence but uses it to promote undeserving people and/or causes). The managing editor of *Time*, I had been told, had “the most influential job in journalism.”

#### THE CREATION OF *TIME*'S LONDON COVER

Shortly before the London cover story was to appear, Otto Fuerbringer, the managing editor of *Time* in 1966, decided to move it up to “front of the book,” and to run it in the hard-news World section. He

invited me to write it, and decreed that my photograph should appear in "A Letter from the Publisher," the "green room" section of the magazine, up next to the masthead. As the rest of the magazine was unsigned, this placement, together with some flattering text, created the impression that I had created the whole story by myself. Far from it: "Swinging London" was a typical example of what we staffers called "group journalism."

Although this term implies that every story was created in conferences, and although conferences to discuss story lists were part of the weekly routine, what "group journalism" really meant was that every story was the product of many hands—too many to assign any one author to it—but with these hands working in sequence rather than simultaneously. In the case of the London cover, most of its textual material had been assembled by five correspondents in our London bureau, led by Murray Gart. Their "files" had been telexed to New York, where I, as the writer, created the original draft of the story, mostly by incorporating the London files, but adding some material of my own or from other sources.

After being typed up by the copy desk, my "writer's version" was then edited by the World section's senior editor, Edward L. Jamieson and, in this case, heavily edited. After retyping, the story next went to Fuerbringer for "top-editing," and—in this case—emerged from "top-editing" with only a few minor changes. After the story had thus become "checking copy," it was fact-checked by a researcher, in this case Mary McConachie. Finally, the whole story was copy-edited for spelling and grammar by somebody (I never knew who) at the copy desk.

Like McConachie, almost all the women on the editorial staff in the New York office of *Time* were researchers or copy editors. Women writers were still rare, and no woman within living memory had written a cover.<sup>2</sup> Since I was a woman, my colleagues may

have expected me to focus on fashion and entertainment, but I felt that, if the story was appearing in the 'World' section, it should try to show why "Swinging London" was a part of history. For this reason, I introduced some social content, an outline of political developments over the previous decade and very general comment on economic conditions.

Some of this material appeared for the first time in the writer's draft, and was based on or derived from my personal experience of London. I had visited it briefly for the first time as an adolescent in 1947, become a passionate Anglophile as a result, and followed its political and cultural developments thereafter through college courses, American newspapers and magazines, English novels, movies, plays and two English roommates, plus another brief visit to London in the spring of 1965. In addition, before the London bureau began its research, I had telexed them a "scheduling query" in which I had outlined my ideas and told these correspondents in London either to shoot them down, or to substantiate them with interviews and statistics—so some of the cover research from London indirectly reflected my experience as well.

#### OBJECTIVITY AND STYLE

I make no claims to objectivity on the subject of "Swinging London" or *Time*'s cover story on it. After all, I participated in the creation of the story, and witnessed at least some of its subject matter first-hand. I am aware that the first person singular is not the ideal way of presenting a scholarly paper, but in this case, I cannot see any way around it. To present its findings by referring to myself in the third person would be awkward, artificial and interrupt the narrative flow of the piece.

To balance these disadvantages for a scholarly paper, I can argue that I may know more than anybody else about the subsequent relationship between the cover

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<sup>2</sup> I was far from the first woman to write for *Time*, but almost all of my predecessors had been forgotten by the men on it when I started to write for it. Among those forgotten was Anna North, who wrote a

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cover story on Alexander Fleming, discoverer of penicillin, during World War II—when so many men were in the services that women were allowed to write for *Time* (and *Newsweek*). See A Letter from the Publisher, *Time*, June 5, 1944.

and its subject, having followed it for decades. I may have whatever detachment can come with the passage of all that time, plus whatever additional detachment may have come from having left my job at Time in 1969, three years after the cover (full disclosure: I still receive a pension of \$125 a month from Time Inc., and belong to the Time-Life Alumni Society, an organization devoted almost exclusively to social pursuits).

A further possible source of detachment is that I have devoted many of the years since I left Time to scholarly endeavors, a professional arena that may (or may not) be somewhat removed from the more temporally-bound one of journalism. This orientation leads me to emphasize that this paper is a long-distance effort, and therefore based on only very partial research. I lack the time and money to go to London myself at present, and immerse myself more thoroughly in the hundreds of books and articles that have been written—mostly in the U.K.—about “Swinging London” since the Time cover story appeared. Thus all I can offer about the evolving personae of both the cover story and its subject are some conclusions based on the literature I have been able to find in New York libraries, plus—in the latter part of the paper—what has crossed the Atlantic via the Internet. To me, even this long-distance view enables me to discern a pattern, although not all of my readers may agree.

#### SWINGING LONDON: VISUAL IMPACT

Time’s cover design for “Swinging London” was a brightly-colored collage by Geoffrey Dickinson<sup>3</sup> which can be seen on Time magazine’s archive.<sup>4</sup> As the reader may (or may not) be able to see (given the small scale of the image), Dickinson’s cover design for Time was a *mélange* of London “sights,” including rock singers, Union Jack sunglasses, mini-skirted “dollies,” a sign advertising *Alfie* (Caine’s newest hit movie, not yet released in the U.S.), Big Ben, a red

double-decker bus, Prime Minister Harold Wilson, a Rolls-Royce, a discothèque, a roulette wheel, and a bingo parlor (gambling was legal in England and not yet in most of the U.S, so it was a big attraction for Americans).

The cover story was also illustrated by black-and-white photographs, a map of “The Scene,” and eight supplemental pages of color photography (color photography was still rare in newsweeklies in 1966). The color photographs (assembled by a separate team of a senior editor named Peter Bird Martin, a researcher named Andrea Svedberg, and many photographers) enlivened the text, which discussed or at least mentioned many tourist attractions of the city: the most “In” discothèques, art galleries, restaurants, casinos, pubs, boutiques, strip clubs, and theaters. The story had five one-paragraph vignettes showing how the dozens of celebrities congregating in London were disporting themselves there. However, it also mentioned the 2,400,000 less famous young adults and working adolescents resident in London, and the rising level of affluence that was enabling so many of them to spend more than their parents had. It mentioned the living conditions of “the lesser lights” who, even if resident in the more fashionable neighborhoods of Chelsea, Earl’s Court or South Kensington, packed themselves into shared flats or bed-sitters as opposed to the private houses of models or advertising executives.

While the magazine’s color spread pictured Crockford’s, an expensive gambling club, and the Scotch of St. James, a fashionable discothèque, the little map of “The Scene” also showed The Tiles, a plebian dancing establishment on Oxford Street that served no liquor, and the text carried a reference to “little old ladies” who were now venturing their shillings in bingo halls. Both color spread and text dealt with Biba’s boutique in Kensington, where—according to its owner, Barbara Hulanicki—“a typical secretary or shop girl, earning \$31 a week, will spend at least \$17 of it on clothing, which leaves her with a

<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Dickinson was a British cartoonist known in the U.K. for his work with the BBC and in *Punch*, the venerable humor magazine.

<sup>4</sup> <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19660415,00.html?artId=2103553?contType=gallery>

cup of coffee for lunch—but happy.”<sup>5</sup> Nor did the story neglect to link “Swinging London” with the political situation, picturing a group of semi-dressed or semi-nude young men who had celebrated the Labour Party’s recent re-election in the fountains in Trafalgar Square, and listing members of the new “meritocracy,” in which aristocrats and celebrities from working class backgrounds were able to mix and mingle.

#### CULTURAL RENAISSANCE OR SEXUAL REVOLUTION?

Time conceded that this was a period when Britain had lost an empire and devalued its pound, but it did not dwell upon the negative consequences of those events. Instead, it argued that in the process, the country had recovered a lightness of heart lost while bearing the burdens of world leadership. London, the story emphasized, was experiencing a cultural Renaissance akin to that in the first Elizabethan era, with great theater, movies and music. The special physical and social qualities that made it such a pleasant place to live in and visit were also outlined. The story did quote a British journalist who considered the whole phenomenon of “Swinging London” as decadent as sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Venice, but it did not linger over this quotation.

The most immediate “news” in the cover story was the several color photos of fresh-faced young women in pantsuits and miniskirts. Pantsuits for women were still novel in America, as were the flamboyant men’s clothes for sale in London’s Carnaby Street. Although the male fashions were more than the editors of Time dared to show its heartland readers, the miniskirts they did publish were a real shocker—hemlines three to five inches higher than any streetwear available in the U.S.!

To American women, this was simply fashion (if admittedly a fashion that looked best on very young or very petite women, and thus, as Quant pointed out, a key ingredient in the emphasis on youth so characteristic of “Swinging London” in its entirety).<sup>6</sup> To American men, the miniskirt seems to have been more provocative than anything they had seen in years. One New York psychoanalyst in all seriousness told me in 1966 that even a grown man could get an erection from looking at a woman in a London mini. One British historian, Arthur Marwick (1933-2006) was to become particularly interested in the miniskirt: in *The Sixties* (Oxford University Press, 1998), his monumental tome on the cultural revolutions of the decade in the U.S. and in Europe, Marwick would summarize the controversy surrounding the garment’s introduction to the U.S. This included an attempt by school authorities in Tennessee to prevent students from wearing it, and a nationwide survey of police which found that 91 percent believed that miniskirts were an incitement to rape.<sup>7</sup> In an earlier book dealing solely with British society, he seems to have given his own opinion: “Quite simply, as, of course, the Victorians had always known, a girl scantily dressed was a good deal easier to seduce than one more voluminously clad.”<sup>8</sup>

The pictures of those minis in Time’s color spread, together with another of a striptease and several occasionally quite lengthy and suggestive passages in the text, implied that Londoners had become much more uninhibited about sex. Actually, the so-called

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<sup>6</sup> Mary Quant, “The Young Will Not Be Dictated To,” *Vogue [U.S.]*, August 1, 1966, 86. Article condensed from Mary Quant, *Quant by Quant* (New York: Putnam, 1966) 74-76.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c. 1958-c.1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 466-468.

<sup>8</sup> Arthur Marwick, *British Society Since 1945* (London: Allen Lane, 1982) 153. This blame-the-victim observation recurs in all three later editions of this otherwise conscientious book (1990, 1996 and 2003), even though the jacket of the 2003 edition claims that it has been “extensively updated for the twenty-first century”. The passage was expanded in a mid-1980s picture book by Marwick to read: “...as the Victorians had always known, it was a good deal easier to seduce a girl if, in the horizontal position, she had no skirts which she could keep pulling down.” Arthur Marwick, *Britain in Our Century: Images and Controversies* ([London:] Thames and Hudson, 1984) 171-172.

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<sup>5</sup> “You Can Walk Across It On the Grass,” *Time*, April 15, 1966, 33.

"Sexual Revolution" of the 1960s seems to have been far more advanced in the U.S. than it was in England, but one of the most durable fantasies among travelers is that far fields are always greener. At any rate, the emphasis on sex in the London cover story would enable other, dissatisfied journalists to dismiss it as about nothing but sex—or else to write more sensational stories about London for their own publications.

Before the cover appeared (and as the writer's draft said), "swinging" had two meanings. It could be sexual, but it could also mean simply lively, fun-loving or up to the minute—"switched-on" or "with-it," in the argot of the day. Jamieson deleted the reference to the two meanings, and strengthened the story's more suggestive passages. Within months, New York's Daily News (and its sister publication, the Sunday News) would be using "swinger" or "swinging" to mean promiscuous or immoral in other ways (such as taking drugs). By 1969, the words would in the U.S. have come to mean couples coupling with other couples.

Where my original draft has been idealistic, and even somewhat naïve, Jamieson imparted a confident worldly wisdom more in keeping with Time's usual tone. He also added a memorable coda or conclusion to the cover. "The London that has emerged is swinging," he wrote, "but in a more profound sense than the colorful and ebullient pop culture by itself would suggest. London has shed much of the smugness, much of the arrogance that often went with the stamp of privilege, much of its false pride—the kind that long kept it shabby and shopworn in physical fact and spirit. It is a refreshing change, and making the scene is the Londoner's way of celebrating it."<sup>9</sup>

#### INITIAL RESPONSE: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE

At first, the reaction to the London cover story was mostly favorable, or at least that was what I first became aware of. I received sixteen personal congratulatory notes from people within and outside

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<sup>9</sup> "You Can Walk Across It on the Grass," 34.

the magazine. So many newspapers picked up the story, especially in the U.K., that Time's public relations office compiled a huge scrapbook of all the clippings. The magazine had a letters department, which tabulated incoming letters to the editor and issued a weekly report on them to the staff. In the first week, the cover drew ninety-eight letters from Time readers, not all favorable: thirty-nine readers loved the story; thirteen complained about it; eighteen more complained about "Swinging London" itself, mourning the loss of the British Empire and disapproving of so much money spent on pleasure.<sup>10</sup>

Still, "Swinging London" was welcomed, soon after its publication, by three small U.S. journals of opinion: Commonweal, New Republic, and Saturday Review. Favorable articles on London would appear over the next seven months in four U.S. mass-media magazines: Esquire, Look, McCall's and Life. Three U.S. fashion magazines, in their August issues, would feature London miniskirts: Vogue, Mademoiselle and Seventeen.

By contrast, all three top U.S. news media (including Time) attacked both the cover and its subject. Anthony Lewis, London bureau chief of the New York Times, led off the campaign on June 8, 1966. To him, the frivolousness of London meant that everybody was ignoring Britain's economic problems, with gold reserves dwindling, and ports tied up by a seamen's strike. London was crowded with American tourists looking for "Swinging London," he wrote, but all they would find was "a lot of puzzled talk about what it is that is supposed to be swinging about London. Sex is probably most of it—short skirts and plays about lesbians and movies about a comic-strip character like Modesty Blaise..."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Time* Letters Report, April 21, 1966.

<sup>11</sup> Anthony Lewis, "Frivolity in Britain: Nation's Problems Are Dull Stuff to People Bent on a Swinging Time," *New York Times*, June 8, 1966. Modesty Blaise was a comic-strip female action hero about whom a poorly-reviewed movie had been made, but it had not yet been released in the U.S. prior to the cover story and was not mentioned in it. The play about lesbians was *The Killing of Sister George*, an excellent drama that I saw in London in June 1966, but there is nothing about homosexuality (male or female) in the cover story.

Four days later, Henry Fairlie, a recently-transplanted British journalist, assaulted "Swinging London," and Time's story about it, in the New York Times Magazine. To him, "the scene" was narcissistic and decadent: its arts were brutalizing or perverse, and society's younger leaders, instead of going in for worthier occupations like automobile manufacture or the civil service, were compensating for the loss of Empire by bringing "marginal" trades like fashion and popular music into the center.<sup>12</sup>

Newsweek, on July 25, and Time, on September 2, ran major articles on Britain's economic problems. Conservative Time blamed these problems on lazy workers. Liberal Newsweek blamed incompetent management. Both dumped on Swinging London. "In a curious way," Newsweek wrote, "'swinging London' typifies not the modern professional spirit of the age to come, but the engaging eccentricities of Britain's amateur past."<sup>13</sup> Time quoted Michael Shanks, the English author of a book likewise condemning the British labor force, and saying of "Swinging London," "It is gay, it is madly amusing, and it carries with it the smell of death."<sup>14</sup>

American humorists claimed that "Swinging London" did not even exist. Art Buchwald, a syndicated columnist whose flagship paper was the Washington Post, told his readers on July 21 how he had hunted all over London for it, but found it only in Time's London bureau, where he saw "reporters doing the Watusi with several comely researchers," and a champagne bucket on every desk.<sup>15</sup> Russell Baker, a humorist on the Times, recounted on November 16 how he too had hunted for "Swinging London" all over town—until a Scotland Yard inspector told him that it was only "a handful of boys who won't cut their hair and girls who don't have the decency to cover

their legs."<sup>16</sup> Nor was this all of it for the Times: the magazine ran another half-dozen negative or jesting references to "Swinging London" over the summer, into the fall and as late as the following winter. On February 17, 1967—a full ten months after the Time cover had appeared—the paper would give an English editor named Nigel Buxton a full page in its travel section to present an article entitled, "In Defense of London—It Is Not a Swinging City."

More recently, I have become aware that this backlash against "Swinging London" was even more pronounced in London itself—and that the attacks there, too, began almost as soon as the Time cover story appeared. Queen, a sophisticated society magazine much admired by the "In" set, devoted a cover story of its own in June 1966 to what it called "Swingeing London" (a portmanteau word apparently combining "swinging" with "swinge" – an archaic word meaning to punish with blows, thrash or beat).<sup>17</sup> The magazine complained that the "tenth and most dangerous muse, [...] Publicity," had blown London's charms up to such an extent that it now "the grand debunk" was going on, and London risked becoming "Last-Year's Girl," a fate it did not deserve.<sup>18</sup>

Private Eye, a popular satirical newspaper, published a "Swinging England All-Purpose Titillation Supplement," ostensibly intended to help the "very small number of American publications" that had not yet run articles on the phenomenon.<sup>19</sup> London Life, a third English journal, published a parody illustrated with photographs of Allan Sherman, the American comedian, running around to all the local "in" spots, trying—and failing—to get 'with it'. Even more damning was the fact that many and maybe most of "Swinging London" s celebrities suddenly decided that

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<sup>12</sup> Henry Fairlie, "Britain Seems Willing to Sink Giggling Into the Sea," *New York Times Magazine*, June 12, 1966.

<sup>13</sup> "Britain at the Brink," *Newsweek*, July 25, 1966, 34.

<sup>14</sup> "How the Tea Break Could Ruin England," *Time*, Sept. 2, 1966, 20.

<sup>15</sup> Art Buchwald, "Capitol Punishment," *Washington Post*, July 21, 1966.

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<sup>16</sup> Russell Baker, "Observer: Cold Feet in Swinging London," *New York Times*, November 16, 1966.

<sup>17</sup> In 1967, the British pop artist Richard Hamilton would use "Swingeing London" to title a series of paintings based on a photograph showing Mick Jagger and the London art dealer Robert Fraser hand-cuffed together after being arrested on drug-related charges.

<sup>18</sup> "Swingeing London: The Truth," *Queen*, June 22, 1966, 40-41.

<sup>19</sup> Max Décharné, *King's Road: The Rise and Fall of the Hippest Street in the World* (London: Wiedenfeld & Nicolson, 2005) xix.

they did not want to be considered “swinging” any more. When Terence Stamp, the movie actor, overheard a fellow customer in a London shop describe some item as “swinging,” he muttered furiously, “that bloody expression.”<sup>20</sup>

At the time, I knew next to nothing of this negative reaction in London. For me, the best thing about the cover story had been an invitation from an editor at Coward McCann, an American publishing house. He wanted me to write a guide book to “Swinging London” for them, and I welcomed the chance to give my version of the story (as opposed to that of Time). When I visited London in June, to gather material for this book, I heard no objections to the cover story from any of the many people I interviewed. True, one Labour Party Member of Parliament (over an elegant lunch at Les Ambassadeurs) delivered a blistering attack to me on how Time was put together, with the whole magazine reflecting the views of the one man at the top, but I felt that this had more to do with its political positions in general—and most likely its Vietnam policies—than with its cover story on London.

On the other hand, I was already at least partially aware of what seems to have been a common theme in these British critiques of the cover, since it was also common to the New York ones—namely, that not all of London was as “swinging” as the cover story implied. In U.S. publications, this complaint mostly revolved around the idea that the youthful, modernistic spirit of “swinging London” only represented a small part of the city’s (and the country’s) population, and that most of Britain and even London was still as old-fashioned and traditional as it had always been. In the U.K., the emphasis was more on the socioeconomic status of “swinging London,” and the claim that it only existed among a couple of hundred wealthy movers, shakers and celebrities.

I agreed with the U.S. complaint, up to a point anyway, and dealt with it in the introduction to my book, *A Swinger’s Guide to London* (1967). The U.K. complaint, which tended to ignore the mass appeal of “Swinging London,” and even the modest extent to which the Time cover recognized this mass appeal, was to persist in books published in the U.K. for decades. As I did not become fully aware of this complaint until I revisited the story in the early part of this century, I did not deal with it in my own writing until then.<sup>21</sup>

#### WHY ALL THE NEGATIVITY?

Why all the negativity, one asks in retrospect? What had Time done to deserve so many attacks for what was intended as compliment? Some of the reaction, especially in the U.S. and among Time’s heartland readers, may have been due to shock. Boys with long hair and ruffled shirts may have seemed effeminate; girls in pantsuits mannish. Those lascivious miniskirts recalled the orgies of ancient Rome, while the notion that they were both evidence of abandoned behavior and an incitement to rape would surface—as Marwick was to indicate—in many newspapers of the day and at least two British history books since. The fact that Merrie Olde England had for so long seemed to escape the more opprobrious aspects of modernity, and remained until so recently the land of tea, crumpets, lavender and tweed, must have added to the shock.

The fact that a mere woman seemed responsible for the cover might have been another factor in discounting it. Given the scarcity of women elsewhere in the U.S. news media, this element might have been a factor even among its more liberal men. My colleagues on Time were probably not the only journalists under the impression that women could deal only with entertainment and fashion. Most hard-news stories about politics and economics on other publications, too, were still written by men, so it might

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<sup>20</sup> Shawn Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go! The Smashing Rise and Giddy Fall of Swinging London* (New York: Doubleday, 2002) 204-205.

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<sup>21</sup> See Chapter 9, “The Response: Amateur, Ruthless Girl Agent, Harlot,” in Piri Halasz, *A Memoir of Creativity: Abstract Painting, Politics and the Media* (New York: iUniverse, 2009).

have been felt that whatever Time's woman writer might have said about the politics, economics and social implications of "Swinging London" was not to be relied upon.

Another factor, I would guess, was that the U.S. news media were following the London media, and this would have been especially true of the New York Times. But Britons also had their own reasons for resenting Time's coverage: Britain's opposition at that point to the American involvement in Vietnam may have been even stronger than it was among the wider U.S. public. Time magazine, with its somewhat aggressive patriotism, represented a particularly obnoxious form of Yankee imperialism: cultural imperialism. Some Britons were already irate about other Yankee imports, from rock 'n' roll to Andy Warhol. The feeling was that such invasions overshadowed the local products.

In a broader sense, too, some Britons—especially the older ones—may still have been smarting over the way that U.S., following upon the commanding role it played in World War II, had taken over from the U.K. as a leader of the international community. There may even have been shame over the way that, since the war, the once all-powerful British Empire had dwindled away into only a shadow of its former self.

Yet another factor may have been the fact that, in my experience, the British—unlike Americans—did not much like foreign writers writing about them, even favorably. Insular to the end, they were more apt to listen with approval to one of their own. An additional source of aggravation must have been the fact that many (though not all) of the hot spots mentioned by Time were expensive by local standards, but—thanks to a still very favorable exchange rate—still a bargain for Yankee tourists (and even more of a bargain for Yankee journalists on expense accounts).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See Anthony Blond, "Swingers – I hate you," *Queen*, June 22, 1966, 46. Blond, the publisher of *Queen*, estimated that "writer Halasz" must be making \$20,000 a year in order to enjoy all of those London pleasures that less affluent Londoners could not afford. Actually, writer Halasz was making more like \$13,000, while Blond's concern for less affluent Londoners must be taken as noblesse oblige, since all the

Finally, the cover story was so overdrawn that overkill became a factor. It was all too much, especially for those aspects of "Swinging London" that were supposed to be especially private, not even public within England itself. The most fashionable casinos and discothèques were (at least nominally) private clubs, and not every swinging Londoner wanted to publicize his or her sexual mores. In fact, few of the leaders of "Swinging London" wanted that much publicity, even in a more general sense.

Though they had courted it initially—especially those members of it whose livelihoods depended upon broad public acceptance of their talents—they did not appreciate having their home turf overrun by legions of common tourists. Tourists, in those days, were mostly considered archetypal outsiders (as opposed to "world travelers," who were always "in the know"). And some—maybe many—American tourists did not counteract this impression. [I can remember feeling embarrassed in London theaters in the 1960s and 1970s upon hearing American accents (which carry, especially the female ones) complaining about a play clear across the lobby at intermission. Other unlovely recollections of my fellow Americans include a busload of overweight middle-aged ladies in pastel-colored pantsuits debarking in Leicester Square, and a man in front of me in a queue for tickets at a Shaftesbury Avenue theater berating the ticket seller because the ticket he wanted had already sold out.]

Within fifteen months of the Time cover story appearing, "Swinging London" did appear to have become what *Queen* most dreaded: "Last-Year's-Girl." Time alone was certainly not responsible: among the many books that have since dealt with the phenomenon, the consensus is that London had already been swinging since the early 1960s, and was pretty well ready to move on when the Time cover appeared. I could see the change when I revisited the city in the summer of 1967, "Swinging London" had come to mean little more than sleazy paperback guide

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rest of *Queen's* content (editorial and advertising) dealt with and was presumably addressed to the moneyed classes.

books to its tackier attractions, such as those being peddled off carts to the dumber sorts of tourists in Piccadilly Circus.

Meanwhile, many (if not all) members of the In-crowd, sashaying along the King's Road in Chelsea, had abandoned Quant for the beads and tie-dyed fashions emanating from the hippie haven of San Francisco. Thanks again to U.S. news media (especially Newsweek and Time), "the flower children" of Haight-Ashbury were spreading their ingenuous gospel of "tune in, turn on, drop out" around the world, and what both Americans and Britons called "the counterculture" had arrived. My transistor radio, tuned to the offshore "pirate" stations that (in defiance to the BBC) had initially put over British pop, picked up, over and over, an American tune, "If you're going to San Francisco, be sure to wear some flowers in your hair..."

In the U.S., another key factor contributing to the antagonism to "Swinging London" among the journalistic community was doubtless Time's hawkish Vietnam policy, directed as it was almost wholly by Fuerbringer, and despite the subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) opposition of Richard Clurman, chief of Time Inc.'s correspondents. In 1966, the question of whether or not the war should still be pursued was still up in the air. Admittedly, Newsweek was already looking for ways to disengage, but the Times, at least officially, was still uncommitted, and other important publications, including the Washington Post, the Wall Street Journal and the Saturday Evening Post, were still supporting the war.

From what I had heard from a knowledgeable colleague, I had concluded that the U.S. could not win in Vietnam. It was also my experience that reporters from rival publications—including those from despised Time—talked extensively with each other: journalism was (and for all I know, still is) like a whole underground community. So in retrospect, I have come to believe that this conclusion regarding the futility of the war was widespread both among my colleagues in Time's New York headquarters, and even more among its reporters and other correspondents,

certainly those on Newsweek and not excluding those with the Times. Yet—having very carefully read the Times for that period on microfilm and therefore been able to see everything it published—I have found no evidence that any of its reporters were yet saying in print that the U.S. should pull out.

Nobody at Time was saying it in print either, although Clurman was a fervent supporter of his correspondents and Henry Grunwald, one of Time's most popular senior editors (and the man who would two years later succeed Fuerbringer) was known to favor "a more enlightened policy on Vietnam."

As a result, all this feeling against the war must still have been simmering underground. Vietnam, not "Swinging London," was the defining issue of the period, the one that influenced how everybody felt about everything else, and one that almost nobody could remain unemotional about. To the extent that I managed to do so, it was by doing my best not to think about it at all, but in the years since, I have come to believe that many people hated Time (even more than they had hated it formerly) for—as they saw it—causing so much death and destruction by prolonging the conflict. If, in fact, the managing editor of Time in 1966 had "the most influential job in U.S. journalism," then Fuerbringer must have been the most unpopular man in U.S. journalism as well.

What is the point of all this? Simply, it leads me to believe that to the U.S. press corps as a whole (and more specifically, to its members on the Times), Time—and more specifically, Otto Fuerbringer—could do no right. Hence, any opportunity to take it, and him, down was to be welcomed. "Swinging London" offered that opportunity, and so it was to be ridiculed, reduced to a silly joke. This is a conclusion I have come to only in retrospect, but—in light of subsequent developments—it still seems to fit the facts.

#### LOOKING BACK I: THE INITIAL HISTORIES OF THE PERIOD

After my guidebook was published in 1967, I put "Swinging London" aside and, for thirty years, devoted

myself primarily to the visual arts. Although I lived in London for nearly two years right after I left Time in 1969, my flat was in un-swinging West Kensington, and I went to art-historical museums and classical theater rather than discothèques or fashionable restaurants. However, in 1996, I began a memoir: its prime purpose was to introduce a theory about abstract painting, but it required revisiting Time's 1966 cover story. I found that both it and "Swinging London" itself had been dealt with in many books, most of which were by Britons and published in the U.K. but available in New York bookstores or libraries. In my memoir, I would list thirteen books discovered during this period. Though I was still unaware of how the London media and English celebrities had initially reacted to the cover story, I could see that almost all of these books were negative or ambivalent about the subject of "Swinging London" and/or the cover story.

The earliest was Christopher Booker's *The Neophiliacs*, published by the London trade house of Collins in 1969. Booker (born 1937) was a journalist who had helped to found Private Eye, and has since become known for opposing the scientific consensus on global warming and the dangers of asbestos. He maintained that the swinging society was infatuated with "the new," and emphasized that the press coverage of this society had begun a year before Time's story (as indeed it had, with John Crosby, an American television critic based in London, contributing a much more voyeuristic article than that of Time to the London Weekend Telegraph).

Bernard Levin (1928-2004) was another journalist, well-known for the often provocative positions he took in his newspaper columns; his book on "Swinging London" was *The Pendulum Years*, published by another London trade house, Jonathan Cape, in 1970. It was mostly about Britain's economic and political problems in the 1960s, and Levin had difficulty getting beyond them. The country, he wrote, "Began to stumble, then to stagger, then to fall down. Eventually she had fallen down so often that she was

not only covered in mud but the laughing-stock of the passers-by."<sup>23</sup>

A much more sympathetic analysis of "Swinging London" was taken by Brian Masters (born 1939). A popular author rather than a journalist, Masters is best known today for books on serial killers and the British aristocracy, but he also wrote *The Swinging Sixties*, published by a third London trade house, Constable, in 1985. It began with a discussion of how the phrase "Swinging London" originated: he credited it to the American Melvin Lasky, editor of the London-based little magazine *Encounter*, when Lasky was being interviewed by a Time correspondent preparing the cover story.<sup>24</sup> This beginning enabled Masters to work in a reference to the cover story itself without having to evaluate it or comment upon it beyond saying that it was "now-famous." His treatment of the phenomenon itself, while rich in its particulars, was similarly ambivalent. He quoted from Swinging London's detractors as well as listing its achievements, and concluded his introduction by saying, "In the end, it should be clear that the kaleidoscope of sins and boons which galloped through the decade left the country entirely different from what it had been before."<sup>25</sup>

The first author with academic credentials to deal with "Swinging London" was Roy Porter (1946-2002). Although again best known for popular books on other subjects, ranging from medicine to the Enlightenment, he did take a PhD from Cambridge in 1974, and published *London: A Social History* in 1995. It was the first book to be published by a university press, and by an American one at that: Harvard. A "crossover" book, designed for both students and a learned adult readership, its chapter on "Swinging London: Dangling Economy, 1945-1975" conceded

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<sup>23</sup> Bernard Levin, *The Pendulum Years: Britain and the Sixties* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970) 9.

<sup>24</sup> This is one of a number of theories. The phrase has also been traced to the Weekend Telegraph article by John Crosby, to the song "England Swings" by the American Roger Miller, and to the general use of musical terms from the 1930s among many young people in London at the time.

<sup>25</sup> Brian Masters, *The Swinging Sixties* (London: Constable, 1985) 33.

that the growth in industries like fashion, design, music, photography, modeling, magazines and advertising, "created wealth and provided work for almost a quarter of a million Londoners, in the process giving London a new image and its people a fresh sense of identity and vitality."<sup>26</sup> But most of the chapter was devoted to the decline of the Port of London, the loss of heavy industry and manufacturing jobs, the destruction of handsome old buildings, the erection of ugly new ones, housing shortages and problems with immigration. Porter concluded that the economic downswings of the 1970s and especially the 1980s "showed up Swinging London for what it was: a veneer of modernity on an ageing superstructure."<sup>27</sup>

Similarly patronizing discussions of the phenomenon of "Swinging London" can be found in three other books from the period between 1986 and 2001: *Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties, 1960-75*, published in 1986, by Robert Hewison (born 1943); *A History of London*, published in 1998, by Stephen Inwood (born 1947); and *London: The Biography* by Peter Ackroyd, published in 2001. All three books were still the products of trade publishers, and all three were published in London (though Ackroyd's was co-published in New York). Ackroyd (born 1949) is a popular author who was especially known for his biographies of literary figures such as T. S. Eliot and William Blake; he only mentioned the Time cover story in passing. Inwood, a lecturer at Thames Valley College who has since published books focusing mainly upon earlier periods in English history, added a few negative adjectives to his description of the cover, saying that "The article gave American readers and potential tourists a fairly superficial guide to the clubs, boutiques, restaurants and discotheques that epitomized London's youth culture, and fed them some lazy clichés about 'a city steeped in tradition, seized by change, liberated by affluence.'"<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1995) 362.

<sup>27</sup> Porter 363.

<sup>28</sup> Stephen Inwood, *A History of London* (London: Macmillan, 1998) 867.

Hewison, a cultural historian best known as a Ruskin scholar and columnist for *The Sunday Times*, devoted most of his chapter on "The Young Meteors" to building a case for British pop art, pop music, fashion, photographers and "the new classlessness." Then he attacked Time for describing it all. "The analytical reporting in the article is slight," he wrote, though he admitted that "the images" were telling, and said that the conclusion "attempts" a deeper seriousness, quoting the concluding paragraph that Jamieson had written for the cover story:

"The London that has emerged is swinging, but in a more profound sense than the colorful and ebullient pop culture by itself would suggest. London has shed much of the smugness, much of the arrogance that often went with the stamp of privilege, much of its false pride—the kind that long kept it shabby and shopworn in physical fact and spirit. It is a refreshing change, and making the scene is the Londoner's way of celebrating it."

Hewison then suggested that the entire Time story was "a myth" and "for all but a very few...a fantasy." He deflated the phenomenon itself in the same way Porter had, introducing a long discussion of economic problems with "But Britain's economic reality could not sustain the fantasy for very long."<sup>29</sup>

## LOOKING BACK II: RECENT PERSPECTIVES

Discouraged by these books and other developments, I put my memoir aside. But in 2000, I got an email that got me writing again, and this was my first indebtedness to the Internet. Shawn Levy (born 1961) was a movie critic for the *Portland Oregonian* who had written books about Jerry Lewis and the Rat Pack. He reached me through my website, and was writing *Ready, Steady, Go: The Smashing Rise and Giddy Fall of Swinging London*. Appearing in both New York and London in 2002, this book was still the product of a trade house, but the first from an author born since 1950. Levy was enthusiastic about "Swinging London"

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<sup>29</sup> Robert Hewison, *Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties, 1960-75* (London: Methuen, 1986) 76-78.

itself and the Time cover story about it. Making a type of claim found more often in popular histories than in scholarly ones, he maintained that London in the 1960s was "the place where our modern world began." His book had a long discussion of Time's story, much of it based on a telephone interview with me.

A second, equally enthusiastic author who reached me through the web was Max Décharné (born ca. 1960). An English musician and writer, he has published fiction as well as non-fiction, but is best known as the drummer for Gallon Drunk and fronting his own band, The Flaming Stars. His book was *King's Road: The Rise and Fall of the Hippest Street in the World*, published by a London trade house in 2005. Décharné saw the King's Road in Chelsea as "focal point and shop window for the new 'swinging' London," but most of the first chapter concerned the Time cover story and used material from an email interview.

A third book which quoted me but was much less enthusiastic about "Swinging London" was *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties*, published in 2006 by Dominic Sandbrook (born 1974). Although Sandbrook's website indicates that he has taken successively more advanced degrees at Oxford, the University of Saint Andrews, and Cambridge, and although he has held teaching positions, he is far more active and better known as "a professional writer," and *White Heat* appeared under the aegis of a trade publisher. Sandbrook has published a handful of history books, mostly about Britain since World War II, contributed to many newspapers, and produced radio and television programs for the BBC. However, his current column in the Daily Mail is more apt to condemn Labour politicians than Conservative ones, and he is a forthright defender of the British Empire, so it is perhaps not surprising that his profusely-documented study of the years between 1964 and 1970 included a chapter on the Beatles entitled "Introducing the Turds," and that his treatment of the swinging society argued that "far from being open and classless, [it] was essentially the province of a self-satisfied elite....it is hard to deny that the swinging

elite had simply replaced one form of snobbery for another." Given this throwback to a common plaint among British journalists of the 1960s, it is also perhaps not hard to understand why Sandbrook did not attempt to interview me himself. Instead, he lifted several quotations from Shawn Levy's book, reproducing one error that Levy had unintentionally slipped into.<sup>30</sup>

More recently, I have found other and sometimes more positive references. A Google search in 2014 revealed the fact that since I had last researched "Swinging London," some writers had treated it and even myself more kindly. The Internet listed or excerpted passages from books which were not in libraries I had used, and/or were published only in the U.K.; it also had papers and articles that had only appeared online. In June 2006 *The London Journal*, a scholarly online publication, had devoted a special issue to what David Gilbert, of the University of London, called in his introduction "'The Youngest Legend in History': Cultures of Consumption and the Mythologies of Swinging London." Although Gilbert suggested that "Swinging London" was nothing more than "national mythology and internationalized stereotypes," the special issue was a commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the Time cover story, and Gilbert's first illustration was a full-page reproduction of Time's map of "The Scene."

One book that I learned about at this stage of my investigations was *Empire, State and Society: Britain Since 1830*, published in 2012 by Jamie L. Bronstein (born 1968) and Andrew T. Harris (born 1968). Another was *Sixties Britain: Culture, Society and Politics*, published in 2005, by Mark Donnelly (born 1967). Both books were by academics: Bronstein is on the faculty of New Mexico State University, Harris at Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts, and Donnelly, at St. Mary's University College in London. Moreover, both books were published by textbook

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<sup>30</sup> Both Levy and Sandbrook reported that I had found "Swinging London" reduced to a tourist cliché when I returned in the summer of 1966; in reality, as indicated above, this did not happen until the summer of 1967.

publishers, the former by Wiley-Blackwell and the latter by Pearson Longman, suggesting a new level of acceptance in academic circles.

Bronstein and Harris led off their chapter on "Meet the Beatles: Cultural and Intellectual Developments 1945-1979" with "On May [sic] 15, 1966, *Time* magazine ran a cover story on 'Swinging London' that, fairly or not, embodied the cultural meaning of Britain in the 1960s, both for Americans and for the British themselves."<sup>31</sup> The ensuing discussion of a wide range of culture, from design and music to literature and theater, was equally straightforward and nonjudgmental. Donnelly's tone was likewise impartial, though warmer toward "Swinging London" as mythology. "Of course, 'swinging London' was always a highly selective composite," he wrote, "But, as with all constructions, it corresponded to an important imaginative reality, and the myth had a cultural resonance which transcended the tiny cliques who made up London's interconnected 'scenes.'"<sup>32</sup>

Further googling of 'Piri Halasz' and 'Swinging London' showed newer references: there were still complaints, and that ambivalent adjective "influential" had not disappeared from the "Swinging London" lexicon, but some references were more favorable. The most favorable I saw online was by Jerry White (b. 1949), a specialist in the history of London who teaches at Birkbeck College, University of London. In a paper delivered in 2007 at a workshop sponsored by the London School of Economics, he said "It was fashionable then and later to decry the myth of Swinging London, and, of course, it was a grossly misleading tag. But despite her breathless prose, Piri Halasz in *Time* was onto something real enough. She was right to stress the attraction of a city where youth and the new combined so intriguingly with tradition, and where upper-class elements of the London

Season seemed to blend effortlessly with working-class talent...."<sup>33</sup>

Another recent book I learned about online was *Swinging City: A Cultural Geography of London, 1950-1974* by Simon Rycroft, published in 2010 by Ashgate, another academic house. Rycroft (born 1966) is a cultural geographer who teaches at the University of Sussex; in his book, he was concerned with showing how the over-publicized, materialistic phenomenon of "Swinging London" could be related to the under-publicized but far more idealistic "counterculture" that succeeded it, despite the seeming dichotomy of the two. He devoted a full chapter to the *Time* cover, but (bless him) has also read *A Swinger's Guide to London*, saw a difference between the two, and believed that my original ambition in writing the cover was "to suggest that there was something quite serious and profound about the swinging city, its lifestyle and aesthetics."<sup>34</sup> This is true, although the passage from the cover story that Rycroft quoted as "perhaps where Piri Halasz's voice emerges less scathed by the editing" was the closing passage by Jamieson already quoted (above) by Hewison.<sup>35</sup>

Double-checking library databases, I finally discovered *Swinging Sixties: Fashion in London and beyond 1955-1970*, published in 2006. This scholarly catalog to an exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) had an introduction by Christopher Breward (born 1965), a professor of cultural history and now principal of the Edinburgh College of Art; he was, in 2006, still teaching at the London College of Fashion and deputy head of research at the V&A. At the beginning of his introduction, he wrote, "Perhaps more than any other artefact from the mid-1960s [the *Time* cover] expressed all that was distinctive about

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<sup>31</sup> Jamie L. Bronstein and Andrew T. Harris, *Empire, State, and Society: Britain Since 1830* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012) 259.

<sup>32</sup> Mark Donnelly, *Sixties Britain: Culture, Society and Politics* (Harlow, England: Pearson Longman, 2005) 92.

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<sup>33</sup> "Jerry White: Social and Cultural Change in 1960s London," [http://www.lse.ac.uk/geographyAndEnvironment/research/london/events/HEIF/HEIF2\\_06\\_08/glctohegla/social\\_and\\_cultural\\_change\\_in\\_1960s\\_london.pdf](http://www.lse.ac.uk/geographyAndEnvironment/research/london/events/HEIF/HEIF2_06_08/glctohegla/social_and_cultural_change_in_1960s_london.pdf). Accessed September 24, 2015. In fact, White was rephrasing a passage from his earlier book, *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and Its People* (London: Viking, 2001; pb, Penguin 2002), 341. But I first learned about it from the LSE web version.

<sup>34</sup> Simon Rycroft, *Swinging City: A Cultural Geography of London, 1950-1974* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010) 81.

<sup>35</sup> Rycroft 72.

the culture of the British capital....” And, after outlining what the other chapters in the catalog would contain, he concluded: “Benefitting from recent scholarship in social history and consumption studies while also looking to surviving objects for complementary evidence, [this catalog] unpacks the myths, but also re-emphasizes the importance of the period, giving retrospective credence to Time’s final assertion:....” And again he quoted Jamieson’s conclusion to the cover story.<sup>36</sup>

Today, Time has had many women writers (it now has a woman managing editor, and recently had a woman publisher). Journalism in general has many other female success stories, and women have risen to prominence in many other areas of competence, from business and economics to politics. All this means that women writers in general are more likely to be taken seriously now. Miniskirts are common (especially in summer) and I suspect that today only an adolescent male would find them unbearably seductive. Assuredly, we no longer see them as invitations to an orgy—or to rape.

The war in Vietnam is long since over, to be succeeded by other and if possible, more divisive international conflicts. Even before the war in Vietnam ended, Time—under the leadership of Grunwald—had turned against it and joined journalism’s liberal flock. Today, Time is no longer as ominously “influential” as it once was—struggling as it is, along with every other print news medium, to survive.

Britain’s economic problems of the 1960s seem equally remote. Although at great cost, the country has survived them, to face still more seemingly insoluble ones in the present. More recent history books about the 1960s do not shrink from discussing the weaknesses of the British economy during that period, but they see it in a broader perspective, tend to agree that the first two-thirds of the decade were more prosperous than put-upon, and see the cultural revolution encapsulating “Swinging London” as more

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<sup>36</sup> Christopher Breward, “Introduction,” in *Swinging Sixties: Fashion in London and beyond 1955-1970*, eds. Christopher Breward, David Gilbert and Jenny Lister (London: V & A Publications, 2006) 8, 21.

of a benefit than a hindrance to the country’s economic well-being.

Meanwhile, many (if not all) of the stars and outstanding aspects of “Swinging London” have proved remarkably resilient. Sean Connery, Albert Finney and Michael Caine, though now long past romantic roles, have racked up decades of successful movie-making. Mick Jagger and Paul McCartney still make music, to the delight of gray-haired baby boomers. The U.S. pop music scene has become much more insular than it was in the 1960s, but over the years, it has continued to welcome at least some English stars, such as the Bee Gees, the Spice Girls, and Elton John. Even in 2015, a few contemporary British groups, among them Muse and Florence and the Machine, have reached the top of the U.S. Billboard album charts.<sup>37</sup>

Stella McCartney (daughter of Paul) and Alexander McQueen, two recent British designers, still enjoy international reputations. London’s Fashion Week is still one of the top four, along with Paris, New York and Milan. London plays still win Tony awards in Manhattan, and British movies still attract audiences in the U. S. London itself is still a top tourist destination. According to one index, set up by MasterCard, the city by August 2014 was on track to attract more visitors that year than any other city in the world.<sup>38</sup> Admittedly, the most popular tourist attractions within London continue to be the historic ones, from the Tower of London to the British Museum, but fun-seekers in search of pubs and other hangouts for the livelier set—the latter-day equivalent of 1960s “swingers”—can still find them in the capital (though not in Soho or the West End any longer: the last I heard, onetime working-class areas like Shoreditch and Spitalfields in the East End have become as chic and gentrified as Brooklyn, New York).

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<sup>37</sup> Joe Coscarelli, “Britannia Rules Charts Again With Muse,” *New York Times*, June 18, 2015.

<sup>38</sup> Deborah L. Jacobs, “The 20 Most Popular Cities In The World To Visit,” *Forbes*, July 31, 2014, at <http://www.forbes.com/sites/deborahljacobs/2014/07/31/the-20-most-popular-cities-in-the-world-to-visit-in-2014>. Accessed September 7, 2015.

## CONCLUSIONS

What conclusions can I draw from this latter-day turnaround? I am flattered, of course, but I think these references reflect not only changed perceptions of women writers and *Time*, but also changing perceptions of “Swinging London.” These latter and more important changes reflect several factors.

First, popular culture in general is far more widely respected by scholars today than it was back in the 1960s. This reflects changes in perceptions caused by the widening impact of the revolution that started much more narrowly inside the art world in the 1960s with the overthrow of the “high” art of abstract expressionism, the triumph of pop art, and pop art’s emphasis on popular culture as source material and inspiration. Pop music, movie stars, and fashions in clothing are now more likely to be seen as significant historical artefacts, as are mass-media magazines.

To me, it is no coincidence that—as I have shown—the authors of books about “Swinging London” are now much less likely to be journalists, and much more likely to be scholars. Similarly, the promulgators of books about “Swinging London” have become much less likely to be trade publishers, and much more likely to be academic ones. Here are two concrete demonstrations of how a once-journalistic phenomenon has survived the passage from a mystery that provoked controversy among its contemporaries to a primarily cultural but also somewhat social and political phenomenon deserving of a place in the history books.

Second, these changing perceptions also reflect solid economic shifts in all the fully-developed and mostly Western nations, from industrial to postindustrial economies and more specifically from manufacturing-based economies to service, white-collar and professionally-based ones. Advertising, the media and public relations—three white-collar industries—were sneered at in the 1960s, especially by observers of “Swinging London” who did not like what they were seeing. To such people, these three industries were largely responsible for creating the “myth” of

“Swinging London.” Today, we may still be critical of these industries, but we also treat them with more respect; beyond that, when a phenomenon has passed from their tender mercies into history, there is more of a tendency to see it—at the very least—as fact-based myth.

Third, in the 1960s sophisticated people—Britons and Americans alike—turned their noses up at tourists, who were more than likely to be square Americans from the heartland, hoping to take in all of western Europe on a two-week holiday. Since the end of communism, though, and the rise to Western-style prosperity of so many non-European nations, tourists today are as likely to come from Melbourne, Beijing or Dubai as they are from Iowa. Every country in the world that is not currently a war zone welcomes them, too, including the U.S., and even sophisticated Britons—as well as Americans—sign up for tours to Uzbekistan or Angkor Wat. The cumulative economic impact of all this tourism hugely affects whole industries like aviation, hotels, fashion, retailing and food services (from five-star restaurants to fast-food outlets) on a global basis. It is all too big to patronize.

Fourth, the passage of years affords distance. What still seems relevant survives. What seemed more important then and less important now fades from collective memory. This is particularly true as the books are being written by younger and younger authors, no longer haunted—as were the earlier generations—by the shame of the lost empire. As indicated above, I have found that authors born since 1950 tend to be less censorious and more sympathetic toward “Swinging London,” both subject and cover story about it, than authors born prior to 1950, with some notable exceptions (in particular Jerry White and Dominic Sandbrook).

Finally, there is the “Pollyanna hypothesis.” A recent scientific study showed that most people prefer positive to negative language,<sup>39</sup> and this must be even

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<sup>39</sup> John Tierney, “Why We All Sound Like Pollyannas,” *New York Times*, February 24, 2015.

truer when viewing the past. To some people, the 1960s in London may now look like a kind of golden age, and the decade can be seen today as the start of an era, instead of the end of the previous one. In the 1960s, too many people—especially the older ones—were still conscious of the recent decline of the British Empire, and could see “Swinging London” only as the ignoble postscript to a glorious past. Now that a younger generation is writing the history books, and “Swinging London” is so far in the past, it begins to look as glorious as the Empire did, nearly fifty years ago.

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