

(A later version of this essay appeared as ‘Chris Blackwell and ‘My Boy Lollipop’: Ska, Race and British Popular Music’ in *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, vol 22, no 4, 2010, pp. 436-465.)

### **Chris Blackwell and “My Boy Lollipop”: Ska, Race and British Popular Music**

Ska evolved in Jamaica around 1960. I shall talk a little more about its development later. In 1964 there were three hits in the British top ten that utilized a ska beat. On March 14 Millie reached number 2 with “My Boy Lollipop.” A week later, the Migil 5’s ska version of “Mockin’ Bird Hill” reached number 10, its highest position. In December, Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames got to number 1 with the jazz track, “Yeh Yeh,” to which they gave a soft ska influence. Discussions of ska, and reggae, have tended to focus on the music’s Jamaican origins and have emphasized its qualities as black music. In this article my interest is in the relationship between ska and British popular music of the early 1960s. How did ska enter white Britons’ musical consciousness such that, by the late 1960s there were numerous ska hits and, by the late 1970s, there was a ska revival with groups such as Madness and the Two Tone groups including the Specials and Selector having chart hits? To this end I shall concentrate on the most popular of the three 1964 ska hits, Millie’s “My Boy Lollipop.” This song was first recorded as a rhythm and blues song in New York by Barbie Gaye about whom little is known other than that she was not black. Millie, herself, was a black Jamaican. The track was recorded in London using white, English musicians but it was arranged by the black Jamaican guitarist, Ernest Ranglin, who had been brought over to England for this purpose.

The man behind this combination of elements was a Jewish Jamaican entrepreneur named Chris Blackwell. Jews have often been thought of as mediators between cultures. Recently Jonathan Karp has discussed the image in relation to the complex positioning of Jewish composers in Tin Pan Alley in the early part of the twentieth century. He writes that: “The image of Jews as preeminent musical and cultural mediators was rooted in both sociological realities and pervasive stereotypes” (58). Summing up Karp’s argument in their Introduction to the collection that contains his chapter, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jonathan Karp write that:

Arising from the contemporary perception that Jews by nature, as well as (diasporic) historical experience, are the cultural mediators par excellence, Jews were thought to be ideally placed to “straddle multiple worlds: black and white, American and European, high and low” in a manner that cultural critics of the era deemed necessary to the creation of a distinctively American form of music. (18)

I am here making no essentialist claims for Jews. Rather, I am arguing that Blackwell’s position as an outsider to both white and black Jamaican culture—though the latter more than the former—combined with his colonial positioning, which gave him, in England, an entrée into the social world of the English gentry while keeping him an outsider there also, to place him in an ideal position to bring together the elements that enabled “My Boy Lollipop” to become a major hit. In this way, Blackwell converted his outsider status into an opportunity that we can describe in terms of cultural mediation.

### ***Chris Blackwell: Cultural Mediator***

Blackwell, though, was an outsider even to Jamaican Jews. While his mother was Jewish, his father was Irish. Jason Toyne describes Chris Blackwell as, “a brilliant rock entrepreneur, a cultural intermediary for the times, with a sure ear for the strange breadth of talent that was emerging in the late sixties and early seventies” (143). He is characteristically identified as a member of Jamaica’s white, colonial aristocracy. However, his background is much more complicated than this. Blackwell’s father, Joseph Blackwell, was a captain in the Irish Guards. He was a Catholic from County Mayo. As Irish and Catholic he was already an outsider to the English elite. We need to remember that, even in the nineteenth century, the colonized Irish were not considered by the English to be white—for example, Lewis P. Curtis tells us that in 1880 Gustave de Molinari described how English newspapers “allow no occasion to escape them of treating the Irish as an inferior race—as a kind of white negroes [sic]” (1). Right up until the extension of the Race Discrimination Act in 1968, which made discrimination in housing illegal, homes in England that had rooms to rent would often carry signs that had a variation on “No Blacks, No Irish, No Dogs”; the London Irish Catholic, John Lydon (better known as Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols), used a version of the phrase as part of

the title for his 1995 autobiography, *Rotten: No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs*. Blackwell's father was distantly related to the founder of the Crosse and Blackwell preservatives company but Blackwell is clear that this was so distant that he gained nothing financially from this connection.<sup>1</sup>

Blackwell's mother, Blanche Lindo, was a Jamaican Sephardi Jew descended from a Jew who had arrived in Jamaica in 1765 (Ranston n.p.). In a different version of this history, Blackwell claims that his mother's family arrived in Jamaica from Spain in the 1600s.<sup>2</sup> If so, they must have been conversos, Jews who, after the decree by Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492, had been forced to become Christians or leave Spain. Blackwell's mother was born in Costa Rica where her parents had gone for her father's work with the United Fruit Company. David Katz provides this brief outline of the historical positioning of Jews in Jamaican society:

Originally, Jews occupied a fairly low social status in Jamaica. A complex social hierarchy based on skin tone had been established on the island early in the colonial period and elements of this hierarchy profoundly influence attitudes towards race among Jamaicans today. The system placed white English rulers at the top, with their Scottish and Irish lackeys just below. Next were the illegitimate, mixed race children of whites and slaves, known as 'mulattos' or 'coloureds.' At about the same level, or just beneath were Jews and freed slaves, but the Jews later occupied a higher status after becoming allied with the plantation owners during slave insurrections. (21-22)

Katz goes on to explain that: "Rising slowly in Jamaica's shifting social structure, the Lindos made their fortunes from rum and sugar towards the end of the days of slavery" (22). The Lindo family was one of the so-called Twenty-One Families. These families were considered the most powerful on the island. While being wealthy, Blackwell's family was far from being straightforwardly members of the Jamaican, colonial aristocracy.

Blackwell, then, had parents both of whom were in some degree excluded from white society, and who were in similar degree not considered fully white. In a 1954 article on social differentiation in Jamaica, Leonard Broom writes that "despite the

observance of religious holidays by Jewish firms and the maintenance of a congregation, the group is the most fully integrated of all the ethnic minorities into Jamaican society” (124). Nevertheless, Broom goes on to report that: “Polite society is dominated by [the English and Jamaica creoles], or more accurately by the white wives of these men” (124), suggesting a continuing exclusion of Jews from Jamaican whiteness in the 1950s. Blackwell’s situation was compounded by his mother marrying out which would have likely alienated her from the Jewish community and, in colonial society of that time, by his parents separating in 1948 and later divorcing (Graham n.p.).

Blackwell was born in London in 1937 and immediately taken to Jamaica where he spent his childhood. He describes growing up alone and keeping company with the black servants. Then, from the age of eight, he says, he was sent to a Catholic boarding school in England. From there, at thirteen, he went to one of the highest-regarded public (that is, private) schools in the country, Harrow. He tells how his rebellious behaviour meant that, finally, he was asked to leave. He returned to Jamaica in 1955 after he “opted for a non-conformist lifestyle,” giving up training as an accountant with the highly reputable Price Waterhouse company “to try and make it as a professional gambler” (Katz 22). Blackwell, then, had a characteristic colonial upbringing while his life-path was definitely not conventional. The key difference was that he was not descended from white English stock. Blackwell’s apparent rebelliousness at Harrow, and his youthful attempt to become a professional gambler, might be read as a consequence of his lack of fit with white English, upper-class society. In Christopher Tyerman’s history of Harrow, he writes:

Anglicanism may have been next to godliness; it was certainly next to patriotism. Religion at Harrow, as elsewhere, concerned cultural, ethnic, and racial identity as well as belief. Debates over the nature of Anglican churchmanship presented within the school mirrored the imposition of religious restrictions and tests on potential entrants, the equation of religion, class, and race only dissolving in the last quarter of the twentieth century, a century in which, at one time or another, Harrow discriminated against Roman Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists partly on the grounds of defending its “English,” not to say Anglican identity. (453)

With a Catholic and Jewish background, Blackwell would most certainly have been made to feel different and not at home.

In Jamaica, Blackwell's background enabled him to move relatively easily between white and black cultures. In 1959 he spent six months in New York. Later that year, while employed at Montego Bay's Half Moon Hotel, owned by his cousins, Blackwell organized the recording of an album by the blind Bermudan jazz pianist, Lance Hayward, who was working at the hotel. Blackwell went back to New York to get the cover designed and printed. He went on to release the album as *Lance Hayward at the Half Moon Hotel*. During these trips to New York, Blackwell started bringing back rhythm and blues records which he sold to the owners of the sound systems. In 1960 Blackwell also recorded Ernest Ranglin, the celebrated Jamaican guitarist whose work spans jazz and ska, releasing *Guitar in Earnest*. As I signalled above, Ranglin will appear again later in our story.

In 1960 Blackwell opened an office for his new record company in Kingston. Island was named, one suspects with a degree of conscious irony, from Alec Waugh's novel of inter-racial relations set on a mythical West Indian island, *Island in the Sun*. It had been made into a film that had been released in 1957. Blackwell says that the first artist he signed to Island to make a record was Jackie Edwards whose single, "Your Eyes Are Dreaming" came out after Island's first single, Laurel Aitken's double A-side "Little Sheila" and "Boogie In My Bones." The third single was Owen Gray's "Please Let Me Go" (Graham n.p.). This was in 1959. Blackwell worked with Ken Khouri who set up the second recording studio on Jamaica.<sup>3</sup> This studio started to be also used by the major sound-system players, Duke Reid and Coxsone Dodd, who, in 1962, went on to build their own studios.

In order to understand why local recording became so important we need very briefly to look at the Jamaican sound-system scene. This history has been covered in depth in other places.<sup>4</sup> In short, sound systems played music for dances in the ghetto. They were part of a culture that privileged recordings over live music. In the 1950s the music played on sound systems primarily consisted of American rhythm and blues. Lloyd Bradley describes the situation like this:

Becoming dominant above the Latin and mento was a raw, 'cross-the-tracks funk, fresh off the boat from the dark sides of Miami, New Orleans and New York. Louis Jordan was a perennial favourite, and prolific enough to meet demand, the big blues shouter Wynonie Harris always went down well—his US hit “Blood Shot Eyes” was virtually stuck on Jamaican sound men’s turntables between 1951 and 1953. (15)

Mento was the vernacular Jamaican music that evolved from the 1930s and 1940s onwards.<sup>5</sup> Many of the rhythm and blues records were brought back by Jamaicans working in Florida and other eastern seaboard states as seasonal agricultural workers under the British West Indies temporary worker program which had been approved by Congress in 1943. Sometime in the 1950s the major sound-system operators started going to the United States themselves to find rare tracks that would give their sound system the edge over the others. As I have noted Blackwell also brought some records back from New York which he sold to the sound-system operators.

However, around the mid-1950s, the American music scene underwent a change. Michael de Koningh and Laurence Cane-Honeysett explain that:

Rock’n’roll was fine for the children of the Land of the Free, with their newly slicked-back hair, but in Kingston it was a disaster. Dancers simply did not like the new hillbilly bop purveyed by Carl Perkins et al and thirsted for the greasier shuffle of Bill Doggett and Nappy Brown. (21)

Kevin O’Brien Chang and Wayne Chen amplify this background:

In the late 1950s black music in America began to change for the worse as far as Jamaicans were concerned. The golden age of R&B was ending as the rock and roll era began. Black American records became increasingly slick, self-conscious and soft in an attempt to “cross over” to white audiences. (21)

In short, the increasing demand from the sound systems for new music coupled with a shift in the black musical styles in the United States, started Jamaicans looking to home-grown music. Bradley places the development of the Jamaican sound-system recording studios within a class argument. He writes that:

In spite of the Khouris proving sympathetic to and supportive of the ghetto guys' efforts and Motta [who owned the first independent Jamaican studio] devoting time and effort to the marketing of mento abroad, men like these were never going to be part of the shifting cultural development of an indigenous black Jamaican music. Simply because, unlike the sound-system barons, they were uptown men and it wouldn't have made sense. Motta even operated a door policy to restrict usage of his studio. (24-25)

In this history, class obscures what is really a racial argument that ska was fundamentally a black music and the contribution of the upper-class not-quite-white outsider, Blackwell, disappears along with "Little Sheila" and "Boogie In My Bones" which spent over a year in the new Jamaican chart (Chang and Chen 23). Indeed, in Joseph Heathcott's article on the history of ska, "Urban Spaces and Working-Class Expressions across the Black Atlantic: Tracing the Routes of Ska," which constructs ska as a purely black music, Blackwell is not mentioned at all.

Chang and Chen argue that Aitken's songs, including "Boogie In My Bones," "were heavily R&B influenced ... but couched in Jamaican accents. These accents were even more pronounced in other early hits like 'Little Sheila' and 'Judgement Day', a key blend of Afro-Jamaican religious music, mento and R&B" (24). In other words, proto-ska.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, Blackwell does say that: "Jamaican music was so raw but my records were trying to be more slick" (Blackwell n.p.). Blackwell wanted to appeal to a more middle-class audience than the people who listened to the ghetto sound systems in the dancehalls. In England, this desire would be replicated in his attempts to get ska, and later reggae, to cross over into mainstream, white pop culture. His success in Jamaica can be measured in the tremendous popularity of "Boogie In My Bones." Blackwell produced twenty-eight singles in Jamaica, mostly on his R&B label (*Ska's the Limit: Volume 1 – 1959-1964*, liner notes). These included a remarkable rhythm and blues version of Louis Jordan's "Caldonia" by Lord Lebby, who is better known as a mento performer—a track that certainly was not slick!

In 1962 Blackwell moved to England. This was the same year that Jamaica gained independence. Blackwell has given two reasons for his move:

I left the island when it became independent. When a country becomes independent there's an amplified sense of their own identity and, in view of my complexion, my image was suddenly more associated with yesterday than tomorrow as far as Jamaica was concerned at that time. Plus also, and most importantly, my records started to sell more in England so I thought I would go there and start releasing my competitor's songs. (Blackwell n.p.)

Here, Blackwell acknowledges that his skin-colour, seen as white in the fundamental colonial, black/white, racial coding of the country, played a part in his decision to leave Jamaica around the time of independence and resettle in the country of the colonizer, where he had been born and where he had been to school. There was much unrest in Jamaica around the time of independence as the political parties jockeyed for power and the West Indies Federation, established by the British in 1958, collapsed after Jamaica voted to secede in September, 1961.<sup>7</sup> Blackwell, as he indicates, would have been seen by many as a part of the colonial past.

However, the other reason Blackwell gives for moving is also important. It is pragmatic—his records, he says, were beginning to do better in England than in Jamaica. Now, why might this have been? Obviously they would have been selling to the Jamaicans, and other West Indians, who had moved to London. We can posit two possibilities. First, that Blackwell's recordings were beginning to sound a little out of touch in Jamaica where ska had started to replace rhythm and blues as the music of choice in the ghetto dancehalls and where Duke Reid and Coxsone Dodd were beginning to make the records that would be called ska. In England, the new ska sounds had yet to make an impact. One reason for this was the communication lag. It took time for the new music to reach England. Bradley writes that, "to say that ska went massive in England in 1963 would be a serious understatement ... It had burst out of its initial immigrant market and was occupying a self-assured position as one of the country's most popular underground beats" (142). This, though, is 1963, a year after Blackwell had moved to London. It took a while for ska actually to reach England. Bradley quotes Jah Vego, who had worked as a selector for Duke Vin in the late 1950s when he ran the first sound system in London, saying that: "Ska came with a rush. It wasn't no little drip, drip

thing, it was like a whole era came in at once. It was what so many of us over here [England] had been waiting for” (quoted in Bradley 142). He goes on:

One of the reasons it came in so strong was because it took the people back home a while to realize there was such a market over here. Really, they never like to make a big deal about it because as record producers they don't want their artists to know how many records they're selling abroad. So they play it down at first. (142)

In Jamaica, artists were simply paid for the recording that they made and the producer then earned a profit by sales of the single. If the artists knew that there was a significant market in England then they would have asked for more money to record. Consequently, the producers were keeping quiet about their sales in England. This reinforced the lack of audibility of ska there. It is understandable, then, that, for two years or so, Blackwell's recordings, which were being overtaken by the developing ska sound in Jamaica, remained popular in England. Blackwell, we need to remember, was not a sound-system operator like the other new producers and this, along with his background, meant that he was not as directly in touch with the ghetto sounds as Reid and Dodd.

A second reason for the continuing popularity of Blackwell's recordings in England was, as I have already quoted Blackwell saying, that he was trying to make his records sound slick—slicker than the “raw” sound of other Jamaican recordings like those of Reid and Dodd. Blackwell says this within the context of the colonial-based class divide in Jamaica in which, as Bradley explains, writing about radio, “Jamaican radio wouldn't touch the sound-system specials, no matter how popular they proved with the people, because the airwaves at this time were controlled by middle-class types who aspired to ‘dignity’ and looked down upon anything too wild—too black—as bordering on the savage” (9-10). Chang and Chen discuss how this divide functioned in the history of the development of ska:

At first the music appealed only to the ghettos of its birth. But the uptown bands—including Byron Lee and the Dragonaires, The Granville Williams Orchestra, Carlos Malcolm and the Afro-Jamaican Rhythms—soon picked up the sound, attempting to make it respectable by softening the bass line and taking the edge off of the ska riff. (32)

We might say, then, that Blackwell was trying to whiten the music he was recording. However, we could also say that he was trying to make records that appealed to the widest possible audience, and this included the middle and upper classes in Jamaica. It was this ability, which came from his outsider status, to take the ghetto music and transform it for a more general consumption that would make Blackwell so successful in England. In doing so he was a major influence on the development of ska and, later, on the internationalization of reggae.

From a different point of view, that of Bradley and Heathcott for example, Blackwell could also be seen as the person who took an authentic form of black music and commercialized it for a mass white, British and American audience. However, that he was doing this was no problem for the ghetto producers. When Blackwell moved to England he had already made deals to sell their records there. As Bradley writes:

Using his music-business contacts, his means to commute between JA and UK, and the fact that he was white *and* Jamaican ... he quickly cut licensing deals. The Island Records catalogue was studded with productions by the likes of Duke Reid, Coxsone, King Edwards, Lindon Pottinger, Vincent Chin, Byron Lee and Derek Harriot ... while an exclusive contract with Leslie Kong gave Blackwell access to Jimmy Cliff, Desmond Dekker, Derrick Morgan and, as he was still billed back in those days, Robert Marley. (130)<sup>8</sup>

Blackwell's first idea had been to sell records to the Jamaicans and other West Indians in England. However, he soon started thinking about how he could sell this new music into the white, British population.

### ***Migration, Cultural Interaction, and Ska as a Mediated Product***

We can now return to that first group of ska hits in England that I identified earlier. It is important to acknowledge that "Yeh Yeh" is not talked about as having a ska influence. Rather, discussions of the song focus on its jazz origins. To a large extent, this is because Georgie Fame was white and English. That a part of his background included playing ska during his group's three year residency at the Flamingo in Wardour

Street, a club which attracted West Indians living in London, black American servicemen and a small number of white hipsters, and that he recorded with Prince Buster when he was in London, was elided (see for example Maycock n.p.). This was in order to make way for what was becoming a more acceptable image: white, British musicians reworking African-American music. African-Americans, and their culture, remained exotic in Britain. For an example, we can think here of the reception of Jimi Hendrix.<sup>9</sup> In histories of ska the Migil 5 are either not mentioned at all or are considered to be poor imitators. Likewise, Millie's version of "My Boy Lollipop" is thought of as, at best, what is sometimes called pop-ska. Exemplifying this attitude, Bradley, in what is by far the best history of reggae, *This Is Reggae Music*, describes "My Boy Lollipop" as being in a "galloping ska-style" and "Mockingbird Hill [sic]" as being "over-mannered ska" (151). Dick Hebdige describes "My Boy Lollipop" as "a coy love song with toned-down ska rhythms" (67).

Discussing these songs, along with London-based Jamaicans Ezz Rico and the Loaders' version of Jimmy Cliff's "King Of Kings," which almost reached the top fifty also in 1964, Bradley writes that:

What this didn't in any way do was signal a ska invasion of the mainstream, largely because these tunes weren't, strictly speaking, the real deal genuine Jamaican ska. This isn't in any way a criticism, it's simply a statement of fact. (151)

Bradley goes on to justify his comment: "All three of these tunes were recorded in London using largely English or long-term English-based personnel ... so was [sic] far more likely to be appreciated by British pop-tuned audiences" (151). It is clear that, for Bradley, ska is Jamaican and black, and that any music whose makers don't have these characteristics cannot be classified as real ska.

There is a disabling essentialism in Bradley's comments which blinds him, and other commentators, to the complex interplay between London and Kingston through the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and, doubtless, later. The point here is that the intellectual understanding of ska needs to be changed. Rather than thinking of ska as a Jamaican music and all ska-influenced music made outside of Jamaica in terms of imitation and compromise, we should broaden the definition of ska to include, in the first place, the

music recorded in England during the 1960s. The movement of West Indians to England during the 1950s and 1960s is traditionally seen in terms of migration—a one-way, diasporic flow. However, it is clear that this was not the case. West Indians often moved to London, then, six months or a year or more later, moved back to the West Indies. Later still, they might move back to England. Culturally, this constant movement of people brought both influences from Jamaica to England and from England to Jamaica. However, this interplay has been hidden by the history of British anxiety over West Indian settlement in Britain which has had the effect of emphasising the movement from the West Indies to Britain.

The British, as I have just explained, thought in terms of black migrants arriving from the West Indies to stay. The conventional starting date is the docking of the *Empire Windrush* on June 22, 1948. However, such permanence was only part of the West Indian, and in particular Jamaican, experience. More than 60% of West Indians settling in Britain came from Jamaica (Peach, *West Indian Migration to Britain* 48). Jamaica has a history of short and long term population movement. Between 1882 and 1915 168,888 Jamaicans left to work on the construction of the Panama Canal and 119,407 returned to Jamaica (O'Reggio 42). In the 1930s over 40,000 Jamaicans were working as seasonal sugar cane-cutters in Cuba (Bethell 220). From the early 1940s until the 1990s around 10,000 cane cutters, mostly from Jamaica, took seasonal employment in Florida. My point here is that Jamaica, even more than other West Indian islands, had a culture that accepted a constant to and fro of its population. Ceri Peach argues that, in the decades after 1948, there is a direct correlation between times of increasing unemployment in Britain and decreases in West Indian migration (Peach, "Patterns of Afro-Caribbean Migration" 68-69). Over the period between 1950 and 1970 the population of Jamaica slowly increased from 1,417,000 to 1,891,000 (Lacey 7). Terry Lacey writes that:

The key demographic variation was the annual rate of net increase in population, which reflected largely the variations in the rate of net migration. . . . Net emigration was high between 1955 and 1957 (between fifteen and eighteen thousand), about the same level in 1959 (fifteen thousand) and then around twenty-nine to thirty thousand between 1960 and 1962). In 1963 the rate fell by 75 per cent compared to the previous

three years, to around seven thousand, yet in 1964 it doubled again to around 14,000. (7)

The reason for the sharp increase in 1960 through 1962 is not hard to find. In 1962, the British Conservative government enacted the first post-war legislation to control migration, the Commonwealth Immigration Act. This required all non-United Kingdom Commonwealth citizens to obtain a voucher from the Ministry of Labour in order to enter the country. However, in the years when the legislation was being developed, West Indians did not know what restrictions it might contain. Peach suggests that knowledge that there would be restrictive legislation “panicked workers into sending for their dependents, who were not affected by the first Act” (Peach, “Patterns of Afro-Caribbean Migration” 69). Yet, in the years before the Act came into force, between 1 in 3.6 and 1 in 9.3 of West Indians in Britain returned to the West Indies (Peach, *West Indian Migration to Britain* 50). In other words, it would seem that many West Indians viewed Britain in terms of short-term work opportunities rather than long-term residence. The British anxiety was the creation of a substantial, long-term, established black population. Ironically, this development would seem to have been speeded up by the introduction of immigration controls.

In the context of ska, artists often moved between Jamaica and England. Some gradually settled in England because of their popularity there. These include Laurel Aitken who had been born in Cuba but lived in Jamaica from the age of eleven, and who moved to England in 1960; Owen Gray who moved to England in the 1960s; and Desmond Dekker who moved to England in the 1970s. The Pioneers first went to England in 1969 and gradually made it their home because they could get more work there and across the European mainland than in Jamaica. Some Jamaican artists came to tour for extended periods and returned to Jamaica. For example, Michael de Koningh and Laurence Cane-Honeysett describe how, in the early 1970s, Lee “Scratch” Perry “spent much of his time jetting back and forth across the Atlantic” (de Koningh and Cane-Honeysett 53). After the British chart success of Bob and Marcia’s version of “Young, Gifted and Black” in 1970 (the track reached number 5), and the recording in London of the album, *Pied Piper*, which included their version of the English artist Crispian St.Peters’ 1966, number 5 hit of the same name, Bob Andy “started to divide his

time between the UK and Jamaica” (de Koningh and Cane-Honeysett 55). Many artists often began by going back to Jamaica to record and then gradually started recording in England. While the greater movement of records was from Jamaica to England, there was also movement the other way. For example, Millie’s “My Boy Lollipop,” in what Bradley calls its “galloping ska-style,” made with an English blues group as I’ll discuss in more detail later, was the fourth highest-selling single in Jamaica in 1964. The fifth highest-selling Jamaican single that year was Prince Buster’s “Wash Wash.” This had been recorded in England and had Georgie Fame on organ. Thus, contrary to claims such as those of Bradley, we can begin to talk about the influence of British-made ska recordings on the ska produced in Jamaica even at this early time.

There was a constant interaction and exchange of influences, albeit predominantly one way, between Jamaica and West Indians resident in England, and also, to a more limited extent, between Jamaica and the white English pop world. For example, ska influenced the Beatles. As early as 1964 they attempted a ska instrumental section on “I Call Your Name.” The track appeared on their *Long Tall Sally* EP. In 1968 they released the ska-influenced “Ob-La-Di Ob-La-Da” on *The White Album*. It is worth discussing this track in a little detail to understand some of the power relations that permeated the white, pop use of ska. Is it important to note that the title, “Ob-La-Di Ob-La-Da” is not a Jamaican term at all. The story goes that Paul McCartney picked up the phrase from a Nigerian conga player that he knew named Jimmy Anonmuogharan Scott Emuakpor. The phrase is a Yoruba aphorism that translates as “life goes on.” In other words, McCartney brought together an African phrase with a Jamaican rhythm, and wrote lyrics that reconstructed black, colonial life in terms of a simple romantic relationship between Desmond, a market seller, and Molly, a singer whom he marries and who bears his children who subsequently help out on the market stall—a far cry from the life of the Kingston ghetto as it is represented in many ska songs. In short, McCartney constructs a colonial white, fantasy image of an unthreatening, happy, generic black colonized life. However, even with this song the movement was not simply from Jamaican ska to the composing of a white, British pop song with a ska influence. In late 1968, the Jamaican singer then resident in Britain, Joyce Bond, released a musically more characteristically ska-sounding version of the song which includes a honky-tonk piano and a horn backing

that was typical of ska instrumentation. The version gives the impression of being played by musicians used to playing the ska rhythm. Although it is reputed to have sold well in Britain, it didn't make the chart—the white, Glaswegian group, Marmalade, recorded a pop-ska version very similar to the Beatles' own and took the song to the top of the UK chart in January, 1969. Bond's version was doubtless too alien for most white Britons. Its sales were most probably pretty much confined to the black community—whose shops were not included in the sales returns used to calculate the pop charts. We can think of the “Ob-La-Di Ob-La-Da” story in terms of the broadened understanding of the musical genre of ska that I was suggesting earlier. At the same time, we need also to recognize the colonial power relations at work. In postcolonial terms, with a black Jamaican singer and a more classic ska rhythm, Bond's version could be read as a kind of appropriation, a writing back that could illuminate for a white audience the colonialist connotations and fantasies on which the song was founded—and, most obviously, the ways the Beatles, and following them, Marmalade, had reworked the ska rhythm in terms of white, British pop music.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, it was the Marmalade version which sold to the white audience, achieving mainstream chart success.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Millie: The Exotic Jamaican***

Blackwell, albeit with considerably more privilege, was a part of the movement between Jamaica and England that I discussed above.<sup>12</sup> Blackwell has often told the story of how he came to record Millie singing “My Boy Lollipop.” Here is part of one version:

Well, firstly, the Brits didn't buy the music at all at first. Only the Jamaicans. When I started in 1962, 63, 64. Maybe 65 was when the records first started to sell to some of the English. But in the evenings, socially, I'd play my records for friends, and a lot of them really loved them because they'd never heard anything like it. Because, you know, there never was anything like it before. A lot of people really really enjoyed them. The record that was most popular was this record “We'll Meet” by Roy & Millie. This little girl came on in the second verse of the

song, she had this very high pitched and funny voice, and everyone said, “I’ve got to have that record”. That encouraged me to bring her over to England to see if I could make a record with her here because her voice was so distinctive. And it was very successful. (Blackwell in interview with Hanspeter Kuenzler n.p.)

What we see here is Blackwell’s role as a cultural mediator. As Jamaican he has the knowledge and access to the new ghetto music. As a colonial “white” he has access to white friends in London. Here, his Jewish outsider status works to his advantage. It helps his ability to move between cultures brokering the subordinate one into the dominant one.

Millie recorded “We’ll Meet” as part of a duo with Roy Panton for Coxson Dodds’ Studio One label in 1962. Duos were selling well in Jamaica at the time. Their key influence was the black rhythm and blues, New Orleans duo of Shirley and Lee. Shirley Goodman had a similarly high-pitched voice to Millie. Millie had also recorded as a duo with Owen Gray (Owen and Millie) and Jackie Edwards (Jackie and Millie). As we can see from what Blackwell says, his white friends were not interested in the song or the strange, to their ears, ska beat but in Millie’s unusually high-pitched voice. They found it funny. Outside of the mod youth culture, white Britons knew nothing of rhythm and blues. White interest in Millie was as a novelty act. Blackwell here tells the story as if he had had no idea himself of making inroads into white, pop sales. However, Toots Hibbert, of Toots and the Maytels, tells a different story. Hibbert spent eighteen months in jail for what he claims was a trumped up charge of marijuana possession. He says:

I was about to go on the biggest tour of my career. Chris Blackwell had come down from England and spoken to me and Jackie Edwards and Millie Small. We were supposed to go to England. (Quoted in Chang and Chen 120)

Now, the dates usually given for Hibbert’s incarceration suggest that he was imprisoned in 1965 not 1963. However, certainly Edwards went to England and worked for Blackwell. So, if Hibbert is correct in remembering that he and the Maytels were also invited to England, it would seem that Blackwell had rather grander plans for introducing ska to England that include not just Millie and Edwards—who never succeeded in having

a pop hit there but who, later, would write songs for the Spencer Davis Group. The Edwards-written “Keep On Running” reached number one in Britain in 1966 followed by “Somebody Help Me.” Blackwell produced “Keep On Running” and it is surely no coincidence that one of the track’s distinguishing features is a bass line that is punched up the front of the mix in a way that would become typical of reggae. In that same year, Edwards’ soft rhythm and blues version of “Keep On Running,” in a style very similar to that of the Spencer Davis version, but with a brass section and with a piano playing the bass line, was the biggest selling single in Jamaica. Toots and the Maytels finally signed with Island in 1975 by which time Blackwell had broken reggae to a white, middle-class rock audience using Bob Marley and the Wailers.

Millie reached England in July, 1963. She was young, but just how young is unclear. While her date of birth is usually given as 1946 she was often suggested to be younger than eighteen when “My Boy Lollipop” was released—the younger she was made out to be the more innocent and sweet the song appeared. As we shall see, there were good reasons for emphasizing its innocence. Millie was a country girl. Her father was an overseer on a sugar plantation. Her career had started when she won the Vere Johns Opportunity Hour talent contest, a show where the audience picked the winners and which was broadcast live on Jamaican radio. The show started the careers of many ska artists including Derrick Morgan, Hortense Ellis and John Holt (some background to the show is provided in White 134).

In England, Millie was presented as a natural young girl with a big, winning smile. However, Blackwell went to lengths to produce that image. As one magazine article of the time notes: “Chris prepared to groom Millie for stardom. Now her legal guardian, she was enrolled in England’s famous Italia Conti Stage School for speech training and an intensive study of dancing” (“Spectropop Welcomes Millie Small” n.p.). It seems that Blackwell did not want Millie speaking in a Jamaican accent, or in patois. This would have alienated the white audience he hoped to reach. At the same time, when “My Boy Lollipop” broke into the pop audience, Millie was emphasized as Jamaican. Brett A. Berliner, in *Ambivalent Desire*, writes that: “The exotic is constructed as a distant, picturesque other that evokes feelings, emotions, and ideals in the self that have been considered lost in the civilizing process” (4). Millie’s image drew on British

colonial fantasies of the exotic Caribbean and she was distinguished from the West Indians who had been settling in England—the racist reaction to whom, in that same year of her success, 1964, provided success for Peter Griffiths, the Conservative candidate for Smethwick in the general election who used the phrase: “If you want a nigger for a neighbour, vote Liberal or Labour.”

“My Boy Lollipop” was not Millie’s first single for Blackwell. That was “Don’t You Know,” co-written by Millie. It does not have a ska beat. It is a bouncy pop song based in English rock’n’roll typical of the era before the beat boom. Blackwell did not have a strong grasp of the changing pop market. The Beatles had reached number two on the UK chart with “Please Please Me” in January 1963 and number one in April with “From Me To You.” “Don’t You Know” sounded dated. Rather than being backed by a beat group, Blackwell had assembled a jazz-style band under the direction of Harry Robinson. Robinson had led Lord Rockingham’s XI, a trad jazz-style group which had been put together to back the singers on Jack Good’s ITV pop show, *Oh Boy!* in 1958. The group had had an instrumental hit that same year with “Hoots Mon.” “Don’t You Know” failed to chart.

Blackwell tells this story about how he came to choose “My Boy Lollipop” for Millie’s second British single:

I would go New York now and again and buy records and sell them to the sound system guys in Jamaica. One of these records was the original version of “My Boy Lollipop”. But I’d make a copy of each one on a reel to reel tape, it was before cassettes, and when I brought Millie over to England I sat down trying to work out if we could find a song for her, and I found this tape which had the original version of “My Boy Lollipop” on it. And I said, “that’s the song we should do”. So it was really really lucky that I found the tape. (Blackwell in interview with Kuenzler)

The first thing to note is how Blackwell elides his misstep with “Don’t You Know,” making it seem that he hadn’t first attempted to make Millie fit into the English pop music scene with a white, pre-beat boom, pop song.

“My Boy Lolly Pop” had been released by Barbie Gaye in 1956. The song was written by Robert Spencer and Johnny Roberts. Roberts seems to have been an alias for

Morris Levy, a music insider who ran nightclubs in the 1940s and graduated to owning record labels, most importantly Roulette, where he often added his name as writer to songs his labels released.<sup>13</sup> “My Boy Lolly Pop” came out on Levy’s Darl label. Robert Spencer was probably the singer with the Cadillacs, a doowop group. Little is known about Barbie Gaye. She was not African-American but white or possibly Jewish.<sup>14</sup> Ellie Greenwich, the Jewish composer who went on to success as part of a Brill Building writing team with Jeff Barry, took Gaye’s name when she started out as a singer.<sup>15</sup> What is known about Gaye is that she was young, possibly fifteen, and was championed by Alan Freed who played “My Boy Lolly Pop” on his radio show and had Gaye sing on his 1955 or 1956 “Christmas Shower of Stars” show.<sup>16</sup> “My Boy Lolly Pop” seems to have been Gaye’s only recording. All in all, Gaye’s single was typical of the obscure rhythm and blues tracks that Blackwell and others would pick up in the United States to play on the ghetto sound systems in Jamaica—though, atypical in that the singer was not African-American.

For Millie’s version, Blackwell brought Ernest Ranglin over to London to score the arrangement.<sup>17</sup> Blackwell did not, though, bring over any other Jamaican musicians. Rather, he utilized an English blues group called the Five Dimensions. In 1964 having a white, English blues outfit play ska was not a totally surprising thing to do. The mod clubs often played both American rhythm and blues and ska tracks. As we have seen, when Georgie Fame had a residency at the Flamingo he played both ska and rhythm and blues for his African-American, West Indian and white audience. Mickey Finn and the Blue Men even released a single on Oriole in 1964 which was comprised of ska versions of two Bo Diddley songs, “Pills” and “Hush Your Mouth.” Wilthomer, of the *Anorak Thing* website, writes that: “Both numbers rely on the same pace, the rocking ska shuffle stereotypically used by most cheezy cash in’s (like The Migil Five’s dreadful U.K. hit of ‘Mockingbird Hill’) so much to the point that they’ve ceased to be Bo Diddley songs anymore and become more like Byron Lee and The Dragonaires’s ‘holiday camp ska’” (see “Yet Even More U.K. 60’s Ska/R&B Sounds” n.p.). This also helps explain what Blackwell and Ranglin were doing having a white, English group backing Millie. The blues group gave the ska a feel that a white audience found easier to appreciate. In short, making “My Boy Lollipop” more like the other pop-ska songs, the Five Dimensions

moved the ska beat from the upbeat towards the offbeat, which was then emphasized. In the same way, the horns that are a characteristic of Jamaican ska are missing and even the instrumental solo which, on Gaye's rhythm and blues version, is played on a saxophone, is, on Millie's version, played on a harmonica, an instrument more familiar to English rhythm and blues groups.<sup>18</sup> The shift in the placing of the beat makes Millie's "My Boy Lollipop" sound rhythmically remarkably similar to Gaye's version signaling the close relationship between rhythm and blues and ska—though Gaye's is slightly faster and Millie's has a sharper beat.

### *Lollipop Songs*

We should now think about the history of "My Boy Lollipop" itself. Here we see another aspect of Blackwell's role as a cultural mediator. Blackwell knew the song as a rhythm and blues track that he had bought to sell to a Jamaican sound-system operator. In doing this, he took the song out of its African-American context and put it into a Jamaican context. In subsequently giving the song to Millie for release into the British pop market, Blackwell now placed the song into a British cultural context. What I want to do is explore the meanings that were associated with the song in its African-American context so that we can appreciate the losses and gains in meaning as the work of cultural mediation moved the song from one cultural context to another.

I have noted that Gaye's version of "My Boy Lollipop" was obscure. At the same time it was part of a tradition of African-American lollipop songs that goes back to Ray Brown's "Lolly Pop Mama" which he recorded and released as the B-side of "Good Rockin' Tonite" in 1947. Brown's song tells how "I got a big fat Momma, she calls me her lollipop" and recounts, "She says daddy daddy daddy/ She says baby baby baby baby/ Hurry and bring me my lollipop." The song's double entendre is quite plain; the singer's lover is equating his penis with a lollipop and wants to give him fellatio. Later in the song the singer tells her, "Yeah baby, I've got your lollipop." Brown's song was one of many salacious rhythm and blues songs from the late 1940s and 1950s aimed at jukeboxes rather than radio play. Wynonie Harris covered the song in 1948 and had a top ten hit with it in Billboard's race records chart.<sup>19</sup> The use of "lollipop" as a slang term

seems to have had currency in black culture. In 1947, Syd Nathan, head of King Records, and his wife, Stella, visited Harris in his hotel room. Stella Nathan recalls that: “We knocked on the door and a beautiful young coffee-colored girl opened, completely naked, and ushered us [in] in a very voluptuous manner.” Seeing Stella Nathan’s embarrassment, Harris turned to the girl and said: “Lollipop, go and get Mr. and Mrs. Nathan some drinks” (this story is told in Collins 68). The rhythm and blues singer, Alma Mondy started calling herself “The Lollipop Mama” and in 1949 even recorded a version of “Lolly Pop Mama” called “Miss Lollipop’s Confession.”<sup>20</sup> In the 1954 mostly instrumental “Crazy ’Bout Lollipop,” the B-side of Italian-American band leader Ralph Materie’s cover of “Skokiaan,” which got to number three on the American pop chart, “lollipop” is clearly the pet name for the “baby” that the singers are crazy about.

As the 1950s drew on the fellatio allusion in rhythm and blues songs about lollipops became harder to identify. This made them more suitable for playing on radio and television. In 1958, Julius Dixson and Beverly Ross wrote “Lollipop.” It was released by the duo, Ronald and Ruby which was Ross with a singer called Ronald Gumps. Unfortunately for them, after reaching number twenty on the chart, when the media discovered that Gumps was black and Ross was white the track stopped getting airplay. The song, sung from the woman’s perspective, describes how she calls her baby lollipop because “His kiss is sweeter than apple pie” and he’s “Sweeter than candy on a stick.” Here, we can see that the fellatio reference is quite buried, leaving large parts of the audience wondering what motivation there could be for the singer to want to describe her lover as being sweeter than candy on a stick. After the Ronald and Ruby fiasco, the song was recorded in a much sweeter version by the all-white female vocal group the Chordettes. Their version reached number six on the pop chart. Crossing over to a late 1950s, white American, teenage audience the buried suggestion of fellatio was, no doubt, mostly lost. In 1948, Alfred Kinsey and his researchers had found that, among their predominantly white, college-educated respondents, only 19.1% of women said that they had performed fellatio before marriage and only 10% of men said that they had performed cunnilingus.<sup>21</sup> Knowledge of oral sex would seem to have been limited.

Gaye’s recording of “My Boy Lolly Pop” comes two years before Millie’s “Lollipop.” In Roberts’ lyrics, the female singer describes the object of her infatuation,

who she doesn't want to know of her interest, as "My boy lollipop." The only thing we are told about him is that he is her one desire. Here, the fellatio allusion is either there or not there depending on the listener's cultural background and personal knowledge. However, the connection to Brown's earlier song is, perhaps, signalled in the spelling of "Lolly Pop." We will probably never know Roberts' thoughts as he wrote the lyrics, nor how the song was heard by its African-American audience. We can be fairly sure that, white or Jewish, young Barbie Gaye had no idea of the song's place in African-American lollipop songs. Her youthful innocence reinforced a non-sexual reading.

In white, American culture lollipop songs were associated with Shirley Temple's "On The Good Ship Lollipop" which she sang in the 1934 film, *Bright Eyes*. In this song we find the association of lollipops with the pleasurable sweetness that later appears in "My Boy Lolly Pop" and in "Lollipop": "On the good ship lollipop/It's a sweet trip to a candy shop." We might also include in this tradition Marvin Hamlisch's "Sunshine, Lollipops, and Rainbows" which, sung by Leslie Gore, reached number thirteen on the American chart in 1965. In this song, sunshine, lollipops and rainbows, "Everything that's wonderful is what I feel when we're together." In this tradition, overtly at least, lollipops are simply sweet things bought in candy stores/sweet shops.<sup>22</sup> White, British culture thought of lollipops in a similar way to white, American culture. "Lollipop," covered by the Mudlarks, the three Mudd siblings, reached number two on the chart in 1958. In the same year in Britain, Max Bygraves released "When You Come To The End Of A Lollipop," written by the Americans Al Hoffman and Dick Manning, as a children's song with "The Teddy Bear's Picnic" on the other side. The song relates how, when you come to the end of a lollipop, "Plop goes your heart." It was often played on *Children's Favourites*, a children's request show on BBC radio's Light Programme. We do not know how Blackwell understood the lyrics of "My Boy Lollipop," the song that he thought, rightly as it turned out, would be such a good vehicle for Millie. What we do know, though, is that, as I have already mentioned, Millie, already young, was often claimed to be even younger, giving the song even more of an innocent air and therefore making it more palatable to a white, British audience.

We might also think about what Jamaicans might have made of the song. Discussing the history of what is known in dancehall as slackness, Sonjah Stanley Niaah

remarks that: “A look at the songs since the 1950s illustrates that slackness—or more accurately songs about women’s body parts, sex, and sexuality—existed in mento, ska, and specifically in the *Censored* album [1971] of Lloydie and the Lowbites and in music from artists such as Prince Buster among others” (181). Niaah explains that: “Slackness is variously defined, hovering around untidy, and illicit displays of especially sexual practices sometimes referred to as nastiness. It can mean illicit sex, public displays of sex and sexuality, lewd language containing explicit references to sex or sexual innuendo, or talk of body parts” (182). Chang and Chen write that:

a large, and perhaps the most popular, part of the [mento] output consisted of bawdy, suggestive songs. One of the first really big Jamaican hit records was the famous “Healing In The Balm Yard.” Of course the raunchier material was heard only in the privacy of homes or on sound systems. (15)

This tradition meant that the sexually suggestive songs of the blues shouters like Wynonie Harris would have fitted in easily. For example, Harris’ “Bloodshot Eyes” was extremely popular on the sound systems (Bradley 15). This is a song about an unfaithful lover who has been beaten up by the man for whom she left the singer. He tells her: “Your eyes look like a road map/I’m scared to smell your breath/You’d better shut your peepers/Before you bleed to death.” This is not material that a respectable middle-class white audience in either the United States or Britain, or an equally respectable middle-class Jamaican audience, would have wanted to listen to. At the same time it provides a possible context for how Gaye’s version, and subsequently Millie’s version, of “My Boy Lollipop” might have been heard by a sound-system audience.

In saying this, we should also remember that, in 1960, Duke Reid released the Jiving Juniors own doowop song, “Lollipop Girl.”<sup>23</sup> It was the ninth most bought song of that year. This time sung from a male point of view, like Brown’s and Harris’ song, the Jiving Juniors tell us that: “She’s so sweet, she’s my lollipop girl/When we kiss she makes me cry oooooe.” The Brown song has nothing about sweetness, that first appears in Roberts’ lyrics for “My Boy Lolly Pop.” The Jiving Juniors’ song would seem to be a male take on that song. In “My Boy Lolly Pop,” in Gaye’s version, the boy makes her heart go “hippity hop,” Millie sings that her heart goes “giddy-up.” The Jiving Juniors’

phatic shout leaves it to the audience to read what they like into the lyrics; what is having such an effect on the singer—is this merely a kiss, or something more, as in Harris’ “Lolly Pop Mama” that no doubt had been played on the sound systems only a few years before?

***“My Boy Lollipop,” Millie and English Pop***

In England we know that Millie’s lollipop was firmly placed in the white tradition. Commenting on Millie’s voice, *The Daily Express* announced that: “There hasn’t been a voice like it since Shirley Temple” (quoted in “Spectropop Welcomes Millie Small” n.p.). Millie’s “My Boy Lollipop” was received as a novelty song by white Britons. This reception was reinforced by Millie’s youthful innocence and, ironically, by her blackness. While the West Indians who had come to Britain to work were racialized and excluded from mainstream, white society, Millie’s blackness formed a part of her exoticization that made her seem attractive and likeable.

From the point of view of the white audience, “My Boy Lollipop”’s unusual rhythm was offset by the song’s melody. In *Cut’n’Mix*, Hebdige has described reggae, which he uses as a portmanteau term to include ska, as, “like calypso and Cuban music, a product of the union of African rhythms and European melody and harmony” (43). “My Boy Lollipop” is typical of the early ska hits in Britain in having a hugely catchy melody which makes the song instantly available for listeners who might otherwise find the rhythm unusual and alienating. The same point can be made about both “Mockin’ Bird Hill,” an old country song originally in waltz time, with its “Tra-la-la, Tweedly-de-de” refrain, and the jazz song, “Yeh, Yeh.” It was also true of the Beatles’ “Ob-La-Di Ob-La-Da” and of Jonathan King’s “Johnny Reggae.” In addition, we can also note that many of these songs utilize nonsense or non-English phrases and much repetition, thus making the melody even easier to memorize.

Blackwell and Millie were unable to repeat the tremendous success of “My Boy Lollipop.” “Sweet William,” the follow-up, only reached number thirty and Millie’s only other entry in the top fifty was in 1965 when her cover of Harris’ “Bloodshot Eyes,” a hearkening back to Millie’s Jamaican roots with another African-American song from the

1950s, got to number forty-eight. Millie made her home in England. In 1965, signaling again the crossover with English popular music that Blackwell was eager to establish, and also ska's roots in rhythm and blues, Millie sang on the Spencer Davis Group's version of the Ike Turner song, "I'm Blue (Gong Gong Song)," which appeared on the group's first album. In 1970, as ska was transforming into reggae, Millie appeared at the Caribbean Music Festival at Wembley Stadium on a bill which also included Toots and the Maytels, Desmond Dekker, Bob and Marcia, and the Pioneers, among others. This event was an important marker in the public visibility of ska in Britain.<sup>24</sup> While "My Boy Lollipop" was thought of as a novelty song, it, along with the Migil 5's "Mockin' Bird Hill" and Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames' "Yeh Yeh," began the process of acculturating the white, British pop audience to the ska beat.

The success of Millie's version of "My Boy Lollipop" lay in Blackwell's ability to move across cultures; to take a song located in African-American rhythm and blues, match it with a Jamaican singer with a winning smile and a voice that sounded cute to British listeners, and back her with an English rhythm and blues group playing ska arranged by a black Jamaican. Blackwell's Jewish, and Irish, background, I have argued, made him an outsider in both the white colonial and black societies of Jamaica. This background, reinforced by his colonial heritage, made him an outsider also in English society. He was again, for more obvious reasons, an outsider in African-American culture. At the same time, this very outsider experience enabled Blackwell to function as a cultural mediator. He was able to bring his knowledge of all these cultures together to produce a track that synthesized attributes of each of them in such a way as to produce a piece of music that appealed to a white, British audience—and, it should be added, not only a British audience. Millie's version of "My Boy Lollipop," with its whitening of black African-American and Jamaican sounds, was also bought by white, American teenagers, climbing to number 2 on the American pop chart.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the people who came to my presentation of a shortened version of this article at the IASPM-ANZ conference (2009) in Auckland, New Zealand, for their spirited suggestions, a few of these appear now in this version of the article.

---

<sup>1</sup> In an interview, Blackwell says this: “I’m distantly related to Crosse & Blackwell, in that my father was the son of one of the ten or more children of the younger brother of the person who started the company. Very little trickled down to him, and zero trickled down to me” (Perry n.p.).

<sup>2</sup> These details come from an interview with Chris Blackwell (Graham n.p.).

<sup>3</sup> For details see de Koningh and Cane-Honeysett (22-24).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Lloyd Bradley, *This Is Reggae Music*, chapter 2, “Music Is My Occupation.” Also, Norman Stolzoff, *Wake the Town and Tell the People: Dancehall Culture in Jamaica*. In *Reggae Routes*, Chang and Chen describe sound systems as, “essentially large, mobile discotheques playing at dances, house parties, fairs and night clubs” (19).

<sup>5</sup> For one history see Peter Manuel, *Caribbean Currents*, chapter 7, “Jamaica.”

<sup>6</sup> “Proto-ska” is a term used by Garth White in his discussion of the development of ska.

<sup>7</sup> For an account of the unrest during this period see Rex Nettleford, ed. *Jamaica in Independence: Essays on the Early Years*. In that collection Carl Stone, in “Power, Policy and Politics in Independent Jamaica” writes that “the deepening of the economic crisis over the period ... sharpened and intensified social conflicts (labour unrest, violent crime, and social militancy)” (46).

<sup>8</sup> Blackwell’s main competitor in England was Emil Shallit who had founded Melodisc and the label, Blue Beat, started in 1960, which he placed under the control of Siggys Jackson. It is worth noting here, but unfortunately there is no room for discussion, that both Shallit and Jackson were Jewish. Also Jewish were Rita and Benny Izons (also known as King) who founded R&B Discs in 1959 and released many ska tracks through the 1960s using a variety of labels (see, de Koningh and Griffiths 29-30). This story of Jewish involvement with ska is, essentially, a narrative of social outsiders entrepreneurially facilitating the sale of a minority musical form to its audience and mediating that form’s acceptance by the dominant population. In this, there is a clear echo of the role of Jews in popular music in the United States as mediators, albeit in complex ways, between African-American and white cultures. For example, in *Rock’n’Roll Jews*, Michael Billig writes that “Like the great Jewish composers of Tin Pan Alley before them, [the Jewish composers of many of Elvis Presley’s hits] were drawing on the latest developments in African American music to do so” (47). In *A Right To Sing the Blues*, Jeffrey Melnick discusses the complexities in this idea of Jews as mediators between African-American culture and white American culture.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Charles R. Cross’ discussion in his biography of Hendrix.

<sup>10</sup> The term “writing back” in postcolonial theory is credited to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back* who were reworking a phrase used by Salman Rushdie.

<sup>11</sup> Another example of a ska song travelling from a white origin back to Jamaica is the Jonathan King created “Johnny Reggae,” attributed to the Piglets. I have discussed this song and the transformations of its eponymous character, Johnny Reggae, in “The Travels of Johnny Reggae: From Jonathan King to Prince Far-I; From Skinhead to Rasta.”

<sup>12</sup> Having sold Island records to PolyGram in 1987, Blackwell gradually relocated back to Jamaica where he now owns a number of holiday resorts. In 2008 he returned to his family’s entrepreneurial roots, marketing his own brand of rum, Blackwell’s Black Gold.

<sup>13</sup> Some websites suggest that Levy used “Spencer” as his pseudonym rather than “Roberts.”

<sup>14</sup> On the changing racial positioning of Jews in the United States, see Brodtkin.

<sup>15</sup> On the Jewish composers of the Brill Building, see Jon Stratton *Jews, Race and Popular Music*, chapter 2, “Jews Dreaming of Acceptance: From the Brill Building to Suburbia with Love.”

<sup>16</sup> This information comes from “The Beatles at 78RPM” (n.p.). This is one of the sites that suggests that “Spencer” was Levy’s pseudonym.

<sup>17</sup> While he was in England Ranglin recorded a number of songs backed by Graham Bond’s group which, at that time, included Ginger Baker on drums, Jack Bruce on bass and Dick Heckstall-Smith on saxophone.

<sup>18</sup> There is a received opinion that the harmonica was played by Rod Stewart before he became well-known. It seems actually to have been played by Pete Hogman who at that time was a member of the Five Dimensions—though, on the Web site “Jimmy Powell and The 5 Dimensions” Jimmy Powell, who led the group, claims he played that harmonica solo.

---

<sup>19</sup> See “The Coasters Website: The Great R&B Pioneers” (n.p.). Elvis Presley recorded a version in 1955.

<sup>20</sup> In 2005 50 Cent released ‘Candy Shop’ as a single. 50 Cent’s third number one, it contains the lines: “I’ll take you to the candy shop/I’ll let you lick the lollipop” where the listener is left in no doubt as to the nature of the lollipop. Lil’ Wayne’s 2008 single, “Lollipop,” suggests that both the rapper and his lover are called lollipop and the one performs cunnilingus, “That pussy in my mouth had me at a loss for words,” the other fellatio, “So I let her lick the rapper.”

<sup>21</sup> These figures are taken from *The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction* website (n.p.).

<sup>22</sup> I am told that in drag shows for a long time the sexual suggestion of “The Good Ship Lollipop” has been made crystal clear.

<sup>23</sup> Mohair Slim in “The Untold Story of Jamaican Popular Music” has a different version of this story. Slim writes: “The Jiving Juniors’ ‘Lollipop Girl’ was so popular at the Blues dances that on ‘Coxson’s Downbeat’, they would play it ten times consecutively every night. Dodd mistakenly believed he had the only copy - until one night he heard Duke Reid spinning ‘Lollipop Girl’ on his ‘Trojan’ system. Reid had bribed someone from within Dodd’s organization to lend the 45 to him so that he could make a dub: “Dodd confronted his nemesis outside Kingston’s Central Police station. Reid drew his service revolver and Dodd (who always packed heat) returned suit. After an exchange of ‘your mother’-type pleasantries the combatants withdrew” (see Mohair Slim n.p.).

<sup>24</sup> The concert was documented by Horace Ové in the film *Reggae* (1971).

## Works Cited

- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge, 1989.
- “The Beatles at 78RPM.” 13 June 2010 <[http://www.cool78s.com/Cool\\_200606.html](http://www.cool78s.com/Cool_200606.html)>.
- Berliner, Brett A. *Ambivalent Desire: The Exotic Black Other in Jazz-Age France*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002.
- Bethell, Leslie. *The Cambridge History of Latin America*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994.
- Billig, Michael. *Rock’n’Roll Jews*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse UP, 2001.
- Blackwell, Chris. Interview with Tim Noakes. “King of the Island.” *Social Stereotype*. 2009. 13 June 2010 <[http://www.socialstereotype.com/\\_/Features/Entries/2009/4/18\\_CHRIS\\_BLACKWELL.html](http://www.socialstereotype.com/_/Features/Entries/2009/4/18_CHRIS_BLACKWELL.html)>.
- Bradley, Lloyd. *This Is Reggae Music: The Story of Jamaica’s Music*. New York: Grove Press, 2000.
- Brodin, Karen. *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers UP, 1998.
- Broom, Leonard. “The Social Differentiation of Jamaica.” *American Sociological Review* 19.2 (1954): 115-25.

- Chang, Kevin O'Brien, and Wayne Chen. *Reggae Routes: The Story of Jamaican Music*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1998.
- "The Coasters Website: The Great R&B Pioneers." 17 Oct. 2009. 13 June 2010  
<<http://www.angelfire.com/mn/coasters/more.html>>.
- Collins, Tony. *Rock Mr. Blues: The Life & Music of Wynonie Harris*. Milford, NH: Big Nickel Publications, 1995.
- Cross, Charles R. *Room Full of Mirrors: A Biography of Jimi Hendrix*. New York: Hyperion, 2005.
- Curtis, L. Perry. *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature*. Rev. ed. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997.
- de Koningh, Michael, and Laurence Cane-Honeysett. *Young, Gifted and Black: The Story of Trojan Records*. London: Sanctuary, 2003.
- de Koningh, Michael, and Marc Griffiths. *Tighten Up: The History of Reggae in the UK*. London: Sanctuary, 2003.
- Graham, Sam. "40 Years and Looking Forward." *Billboard*. 29 Sept. 2001: G3-G8.
- Heathcott, Joseph. "Urban Spaces and Working-Class Expressions across the Black Atlantic: Tracing the Routes of Ska." *Radical History Review* 87 (2003): 183-206.
- Hebdige, Dick. *Cut'n'Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music*. London: Methuen, 1987.
- "Jimmy Powell and The 5 Dimensions." Feb. 2010. 13 June 2010  
<<http://www.brumbat.net/jimmypow.htm>>.
- Karp, Jonathan. "Of Maestros and Minstrels: American Jewish Composers between Black Vernacular and European Art Music." *The Art of Being Jewish in Modern Times*. Eds. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jonathan Karp. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008: 57-77.
- Katz, David. *People Funny Boy: The Genius of Lee "Scratch" Perry*. London: Omnibus, 2006.
- The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction*. 13 June 2010  
<<http://www.kinseyinstitute.org/resources/ak-data.html>>.

- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara, and Jonathan Karp. Introduction. *The Art of Being Jewish in Modern Times*. Eds. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jonathan Karp. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008: 1-20.
- Kuenzler, Hanspeter. "Interview: Chris Blackwell, 26-5-2009." 13 June 2010 <[http://www.hanspeterkuenzler.com/Interview\\_Chris\\_Blackwell.html](http://www.hanspeterkuenzler.com/Interview_Chris_Blackwell.html)>.
- Lacey, Terry. *Violence and Politics in Jamaica, 1960-70: Internal Security in a Developing Country*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1977.
- Manuel, Peter. *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1995.
- Maycock, James. "Pop Music: Fame at the Flamingo: Golden Years in Soho." *The Independent*, 16 Jan. 1998. 13 June 2010 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/pop-music-fame-at-the-flamingo-golden-years-in-soho-1138903.html>>.
- Melnick, Jeffrey. *A Right to Sing the Blues: African Americans, Jews, and American Popular Song*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1999.
- Mohair Slim. "The Untold Story of Jamaican Popular Music." Reproduced in a discussion board post at *Dancehall Reggae.com*. 10 Aug. 2007. 13 June 2010 <<http://forum.dancehallreggae.com/showthread.php?t=125332>>.
- Nettleford, Rex, ed. *Jamaica in Independence: Essays on the Early Years*. Kingston: Heinemann, 1989.
- Niaah, Sonja Stanley. "'Slackness Personified,' Historicized and Delegitimized." *Small Axe* 21 (2006): 174-85.
- O'Reggio, Trevor. *Between Alienation and Citizenship: the Evolution of Black West Indian Society in Panama*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006.
- Peach, Ceri. "Patterns of Afro-Caribbean Migration and Settlement in Great Britain: 1945-1981." *The Caribbean in Europe: Aspects of the West Indian Experience in Britain, France and the Netherlands*. Ed. Colin Brock. London: Frank Cass, 1986. 62-84.
- . *West Indian Migration to Britain: A Social History*. London: Oxford UP for the Institute of Race Relations, 1968.
- Perry, Andrew. "Chris Blackwell Interview: Island Records." *Telegraph.co.uk*. 20 May 2009. 13 June 2010

- <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/rockandpopfeatures/5356523/Chris-Blackwell-interview-Island-Records.html>>.
- Ranston, Jackie. "Belisario: A Historical Biography of a Jamaican Jewish Artist." *Jamaque: The International Caribbean Luxury Lifestyle Magazine*. 13 June 2010 <[http://www.jamaquemagazine.com/v1/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=42&Itemid=74](http://www.jamaquemagazine.com/v1/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=42&Itemid=74)>.
- Reggae*. Dir. Horace Ové. Impact Films (USA), 1971.
- "Spectropop Welcomes Millie Small." *Teenville 2*, 1964. Reproduced online at *Spectropop*. 13 June 2010 <<http://www.spectropop.com/MillieSmall/index.htm>>.
- Stolzoff, Norman. *Wake the Town and Tell the People: Dancehall Culture in Jamaica*. Durham, N.C.: Duke UP, 2000.
- Stone, Carl. "Power, Policy and Politics in Independent Jamaica." *Jamaica in Independence: Essays on the Early Years*. Ed. Rex Nettleford. Kingston: Heinemann, 1989: 19-53.
- Stratton, Jon. "The Travels of Johnny Reggae: From Jonathan King to Prince Far-I; From Skinhead to Rasta." ---. *Jews, Race and Popular Music*. Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2009.
- Toynbee, Jason. *Bob Marley: Herald of a Postcolonial World?* Cambridge: Polity, 2007.
- Tyerman, Christopher. *A History of Harrow School, 1324-1991*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.
- Ska's the Limit: Volume 1 – 1959-1964*. CD. Polygram records, 1997. Liner notes.
- White, Garth. "The Evolution of Jamaican Music Pt 1: 'Proto-Ska' to Ska." *Social and Economic Studies* 47.1 (1999): 5-20.
- White, Timothy. *Catch a Fire: The Life of Bob Marley*. Rev. and enl. ed. New York: Holt, 1998.
- "Yet Even More U.K. 60's Ska/R&B Sounds." *Anorak Thing: 60's Music and Beyond*. 27 May 2009. 13 June 2010 <<http://anorakthing.blogspot.com/2009/05/yet-even-more-uk-60s-skar-sounds.html>>.