

**A CULTURAL STUDY OF TWO-TONE IN THE SOCIO-POLITICAL AND
ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF THE 1970s**

by

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ABSTRACT

A CULTURAL STUDY OF TWO-TONE IN THE SOCIO-POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF THE 1970s

My thesis concerns Two-tone music which emerged in the late 1970s and achieved the peak of its popularity around 1980. The three bands I focused on are The Specials, The Selecter and The Beat, all from the West Midlands and all having a black and white line-up which was unusual at the time. I explored the conditions that Coventry and Birmingham provided for these bands to come to existence and achieve success in the national arena.

My research included looking at the political and economic situation leading up to and during this period, the growth in the West Indian population in both cities during the 1960s and the development and decline of the car industry, which was a major employer in Birmingham and Coventry, and the wider issue of deindustrialisation that took place during the 1970s. Furthermore, I examined the local/national music scene. In particular I explored the origins of the first wave of ska music coming from Jamaica, the development of punk music in the second half of the 1970s and some of the shared characteristics these two music genres had with Two-tone in terms of ideology and modes of production.

In my research I drew on economic, political and social history of post-war Britain, with a specific focus on the West Midlands in the 1970s, to account for conditions which were conducive to the emergence of this phenomenon. I applied textual analysis to examine the relationship between the social, political and economic context and the message transmitted by various texts, produced by the bands, such as lyrics, music and performance. Among the sources which I used were interviews with band members which I conducted myself and meetings with others closely connected to the musicians.

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I would also like to thank Horace Panter of The Specials for advising me of the panel discussion at Warwick University which also included Pauline Black of The Selecter.

INTRODUCTION

A Cultural Study of Two-Tone in the socio-political and economic context of the 1970s.

My research concerns the Two-tone genre of music, which emerged during the post-punk era of the late 1970s, lasting for two to three years. The focus of the thesis centres upon how Two-tone music reflected the political and socio-economic climate of the era and the importance of the genre's location in the West Midlands in providing particular conditions for the formation of the three main bands. I believe there is a justifiable link between the musical texts of many of the Two-tone bands and the material conditions at the time.

The period in which I concentrate on is 1979 to 1981, the heyday of the Two-tone genre. The bands I focus upon are The Specials, The Selecter - both from Coventry and The Beat, from Birmingham. The Specials started the Two-tone label in the Spring of 1979 and, together with The Selecter, released the first Two-Tone single, 'Gangsters' vs 'The Selecter'. The Beat joined Two-tone later that year for their first single and continued to be associated with the genre with subsequent releases for the following couple of years, though under their own label which they created along similar lines to the Two-tone arrangement. Other bands that were briefly signed to Two-tone during this period were Madness from London, for their first single 'The Prince' whose members contributed to the initial success of the label, the all-girl band The Bodysnatchers and The Swinging Cats. The Specials, The Selecter and The Beat, however, are of particular interest to me for this research for several reasons; they were the bands most associated with the Two-tone genre, the geographic element as they were all from West Midlands and all three had a black and white line-up, which was unusual for the time. All three bands wrote/performed

songs with lyrics that reflected the political/social realism of the time and seemed to identify with the topics with which they were singing.

The two main musical influences on Two-tone were punk and reggae. British punk music emerged in 1976 and was a direct predecessor of Two-tone – indeed Two-tone is generally described as one of the main ‘post-punk’ genres. Reggae music from Jamaica had gathered popularity in the UK in the 1970s, becoming more mainstream with groups like Bob Marley and the Wailers. Both punk and reggae bands used political material in their lyrics as did the Two-tone bands – The Beat’s 1980 song ‘Stand Down Margaret’ was a direct plea for the then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, to resign. The Specials’ ‘Do Nothing’, also 1980, refers to the inner-city streets in the lines “Each day I walk along this lonely street trying to find, find a future” becoming more desolate and the increasing lack of employment prospects. The notion that the music reflected the realism of that time is something I shall explore further.

Through my research I also aim to show how popular music and politics became very closely connected through the active efforts of popular music artists associated with both the Two-tone genre and the broader Rock Against Racism movement. John Street argues that political engagement in pop stars is “less common than can sometimes appear” and that most pop stars are not engaged in politics. He refers to some that are though, such as The Specials with ‘Ghost Town’, where politics is in the form of social comment (Street 2012). According to Alexis Petridis writing in the Guardian, “no record can claim to have captured the spirit of its age quite as acutely as....Ghost Town” (Petridis 2002). These observations add weight to the argument that Two-tone was highly politicised.

In the thesis I am arguing that a combination of temporal and geographical factors underpinned the development of Two-tone. As well as the ‘post-punk’ aspect of

time, musically, where singing about political/social realism had become, to a certain extent, de rigueur, the political landscape was particularly turbulent. Due to a number of factors, the 1970s saw steadily rising unemployment and inflation and a change of economic policy at the end of the decade, initiated by the newly elected Conservative government. This meant that there were many disaffected people in the UK, particularly the young, and particularly those living in the industrial cities, a scenario culminating in the riots of Summer 1981 which spread over many towns and cities. There was also a problem with racism at that time, with the National Front, a far right-wing political party, organising marches and recruitment drives to whip up an anti-immigration feeling. Rock Against Racism was a movement that started in 1976 for musicians, which mainly included punk and reggae bands, to perform at various venues throughout the UK to take a stance against the National Front and racism in general. The Two-tone bands became involved in this movement and performed at some of the Rock Against Racism concerts. A number of the Two-tone bands' songs contain lyrics that reflect the miseries of racism suffered by members of the ethnic population in the UK at that time.

The location of Two-tone music in the West Midlands, is also a very important factor to this convergence as it was where the three main bands were from. I will be exploring the car industry which was one of the major manufacturing employers in the West Midlands and in the 1950s and 1960s, Coventry, in particular, was described as a 'boom town'. During the late 1970s/early 1980s, however, the West Midlands suffered sharp unemployment due to the decline of the motor industry and this had a huge impact on the area and its residents.

In the 1950s and 1960s the motor industry attracted a significant migrant population, many coming from Jamaica, settling and working in the area. This development was a major factor in the formation and concentration of the Two-tone/ska groups in the cities of Birmingham and Coventry, where in some neighbourhoods black and

white people were working together with children going to school together and therefore becoming absorbed in each other's cultures. I believe that the West Midlands, more so than most other areas in the UK, provided the ideal conditions for black and white integrated bands to form. My research into this area is informed by the opinions of some of the main actors, including members of the Two-tone bands, via autobiography, quotes and interviews. Some authors, Hebdige and Jones, for example, have also commented on how Birmingham and Coventry had many venues that were seeing black and white musicians playing together.

Literature Review

There is a limited amount of literature on Two-tone music compared to other genres. There are a few books – *The Two Tone Story* by George Marshall (1993) and Dave Thompson's 2004 book *Wheels Out of Gear: 2-Tone: The Specials and a World in Flame* which both give a chronological, factual account of the formation of Two-tone which includes backgrounds of members of the bands. Thompson's book also refers to some of the political background at the time though generally on a national scale, not focused on the West Midlands. *You're Wondering Now : The Specials – from Conception to Reunion* by Paul Williams (2009) is also a useful book with plenty of factual information on The Specials band members and formation, with brief explanations of lyrics of some of the songs. Richard Eddington's book *Sent From Coventry: The Chequered Past Of Two Tone* is a useful source as the author lived in Coventry during the period of Two-tone and therefore recounts in often thorough and humorous detail, some venues in Coventry and aspects of the scene in general. These books provide useful information about how the bands formed and the music scene at the time. Also, three autobiographies by band members are an invaluable primary source of information – two from members of The Specials -

Horace Panter's (2007) *Ska'd For Life* and Neville Staple's *Original Rude Boy: From Borstal To The Specials* and The Selecter's Pauline Black's (2012) *Black By Design*, which give an insight into the The Specials and The Selecter's formation, personal and bands' situation and intention/ambition of the bands at that time.

I will draw on the academic body of knowledge in the field of popular music studies where I will refer in particular to the following theorists. Simon Frith has written extensively on pop music and in *Taking Popular Music Seriously* (2007), he writes about formalism/realism in popular music and includes a chapter on punk music and punk's opposition to commercial aspects. In *Performing Rites* (1996) Frith also comments on various theories around political lyrics and when/why they have been used. He comments on the effectiveness of the conveying of political meaning through pop music and factors that have affected changes over the decades. I found that this was particularly useful and was able to identify the timing and musical climate of the Two-tone era as being ripe for the implementation of socio-political lyrics, to resonate with the audience at that time. In *Sound Tracks*, Connell and Gibson (2003) give some good insight into authenticity of music and place punk music into a social context. John Street (2012) in *Music and Politics* looks at the political engagement in pop stars and references *Ghost Town* by The Specials as being a particularly good example of this. Simon Jones's (1988) book *Black Culture, White Youth* contains an ethnography of black and white youth in Birmingham in the mid-1980s, which includes areas where members of Two-tone band The Beat were from. In *Analysing Popular Music* David Machin (2010) analyses values, participants and agency in song lyrics and the discourses communicated by those lyrics. He explores genre and identifies certain techniques used by musicians such as use of accents to denote locality/values as well as the lyrics themselves. In *Popular Music Theory*, Keith Negus (1996) includes theories on independent record labels and their relationship with major corporate labels and

the geography of popular music; both of which will be interesting and relevant to my research on Two-tone.

Books which contain a chapter on Two-tone music include Dick Hebdige's *Cut'n'Mix*. The book mainly concentrates on Caribbean music, providing an in-depth account of the beginnings of ska and reggae and cultural identity. The chapter on *Ska Tissue* includes useful information on Two-tone's style/fashion, early inspiration and forming of the label. Hebdige and Jones both describe a particularly integrated music scene in Birmingham and Coventry and I wanted to tie this in with the emergence of Two-tone and explore how unusual it was to have a black and white line up within a band at that time. Simon Reynolds (2005) also includes a chapter on Two-tone music in his book *Rip It Up and Start Again : post-punk 1978-84*. Reynolds' chapter is quite extensive and he refers to the West Midlands boom years, car industry and then decline/deindustrialisation of the 1970s but I wanted to explore this area further. A book *Walls Come Tumbling Down: The Music and Politics of Rock Against Racism, 2 Tone and Red Wedge* (2016) has just been published which contains many quotes from members of Two-tone bands and other key people from that era. Punk and reggae music are areas I will study and there is an extensive amount of literature on these two genres, in book form and academic papers. Caroline Coon (1976) *Rebels Without a Pause: The Punk Rock Explosion*, Dave Laing (1985) *One Chord Wonders : Power and meaning in punk rock* and Jon Savage's *England's Dreaming: Sex Pistols and Punk Rock* will be my main sources for research on punk music. Laing's analysis of subjects of lyrics for punk vs non-punk songs in the charts in 1976 was of particular interest though it is limited in that there is a significant percentage not accounted for. I would like to apply a similar method of analysis to Two-tone songs and would be interested to explore this more thoroughly. Dick Hebdige's *Cut'n'Mix* and Sarah Daynes's (2010) *Rhetoric of oppression and social critique: Music and Society: Time and Memory in Reggae*

Music: The Politics of Hope will be my main sources for the background of reggae and ska music.

The riots of 1981 is an area I will explore and Paul Gilroy (2013) writes in his paper *1981 and 2011: From Social Democratic to Neoliberal Rioting* about how black children born and educated in this country, were less inclined than their parents to accept the narrow options offered to them. Ceri Peach (1986) in her paper *A Geographical Perspective on the 1981 Urban Riots in England* provides some useful factual information and statistics on the riots. The report commissioned by the Government later that same year by Lord Scarman (1981) on the Brixton riots will provide a background and reasons from a socio-political perspective as to what was happening in England's towns and cities for this to occur.

The car industry, important to my research as it was the major employer in the West Midlands, particularly Coventry, and a key factor for migration into the area during the 1960s, is described in papers by Stan Taylor (1980), *De-industrialisation and Unemployment in the West Midlands*; Tom Donnelly et al (2012), *The West Midlands Automotive Industry: The Road Downhill* and Michael Healey and Dave Clark's 1984 paper *Industrial Decline and Government Response in the West Midlands: the case of Coventry*. These papers are useful sources of information that contain in-depth details of companies, contextual analysis of the industry as a whole and Government involvement. Articles from *The Birmingham Evening Mail* from the era provide commentary on changes in the motor industry as they took place. Migration into the West Midlands during the 1960s and the growth of the West Indian population in Coventry and Birmingham will be explored in papers by Robert Woods (1979) *Ethnic Segregation in Birmingham in the 1960s and 1970s*; Robin Ward (1978) *Race Relations in Britain* and G C K Peach (1967) *West Indian Migration to Britain* which provide statistical data and studies into the changing

demographic in Britain's cities, including comparisons with other areas of the country. In a report compiled by Derek Bishton et al in 1978 called *Talking Blues: The Black Community speaks about its relationship with the police*, Handsworth in Birmingham is one of the main areas visited. It provides transcripts of interviews taken by members of the community and relationships with the Police, which resonates with the literature on the riots in the UK three years later. The economic and political climate of the UK as a whole during the 1960s/1970s and Government policy will be explored and the book by Bill Jones and Linton Roberts (1992) *Two Decades in British Politics* and the paper by Frank Gaffikin and Barney Warf (1993) *Urban Policy and the Post-Keynesian State in the United Kingdom and the United States* are two excellent sources for information on post-war economics, the collapse of the Keynesian system and introduction of the monetarist model at the start of the 1980s.

Methodology

For this research I am drawing on a) political and economic history of the UK and the West Midlands region during the 1970s; b) the history and theory of key music genres and c) textual analysis of the songs and videos.

This thesis includes research into the political landscape of the 1970s exploring the Tory and Labour government policies of the decade, how forces like the OPEC oil crisis had an effect on the economic situation in the mid- 1970s, culminating in Thatcherism and the effect this had in the West Midlands in particular. The methods I used included books from the University library, academic papers and newspaper articles on the subjects. I studied the theories of the economist, J M Keynes, which were used by both Labour and Conservative governments post-War until the late 1970s to influence policies. I also studied the change of policy

implemented by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government in 1979 based on monetarism and the effect it had on unemployment going into the 1980s.

The central library in Birmingham had excellent material to carry out analysis to explore articles on immigration and the integration of West Indian migrants into the West Midlands in the 1950s/1960s. I looked at microfiche records of articles in the *Birmingham Evening Mail* during the 1970s on industrial relations in the area; Birmingham City archives, which includes black history sources, was of interest to explore developments that were taking place in Birmingham at that time. Coventry Transport Museum displays vehicles from the various car manufacturers based in the area during the boom years and documents the decline of this industry through the 1970s and 1980s. I explored information held on British Leyland, in particular, and the decline in that company during the 1970s via Financial Times newspaper archives, academic papers and books in Birmingham Central Library. The Library held an event by the Midlands Arts Council in 2015 where members from the various ethnic communities in Birmingham gave talks on their experiences in the City over the decades and how Birmingham became a multicultural city during the post-war era. Various reports have been produced on employment and communities in some areas of Birmingham during the 1960s and 1970s which contain useful data to determine the cultural mix that was emerging.

In addition to the music produced by Two-tone itself, it was necessary for me to explore other genres of music that had a direct influence to Two-tone. I drew on material by Dave Laing and Jon Savage who have written extensively on punk music, together with some autobiographical sources by some punk musicians. Reggae/ska music, being the other main influence, was important to study and the sources I drew upon were books written by Dick Hebdige in particular and academic journal papers to learn about the history of this genre from its beginnings in Jamaica.

Other sources I used included Birmingham and Coventry music archives for information on the main Two-tone bands and other music at that time. This included visiting the Coventry Music Museum which has close links to the Coventry bands in particular and Birmingham library to go through reviews/previews in What's On guides and music journals. The British Library was also useful in containing every edition of the main music journals of that era which enabled me to chronologically go through the charting of Two-tone music, its effect at the time and reaction from audiences, opinions of journalists and band members via reviews and interviews. I have also used the University's e-resources for *Rockpages* which provides access to interviews with members of the groups at the time and music journal articles reviewing the music.

Other media sources which I have been able to draw upon have been television and radio. A Two-tone documentary was made in the 1990s which includes footage of performances of the bands, an Arena programme from 1980 was a useful source and the BBC has recently produced various documentaries on music from this era both on television and radio. This can be triangulated with my other strands of research, particularly on the locality elements, the multiculturalism of the West Midlands and the music itself.

Songs from the era provide another valuable source for textual analysis. I analysed the lyrics that the Two-tone bands used in many of their songs to identify the politics and social realism contained within them, showing how the songs were used to express feelings of frustration of life at that time as experienced by many. I will demonstrate that the lyrics will place many of the songs in the year they were written, with often specific reference to political events and participants, providing a snapshot of the era.

In order to put the music into context and demonstrate a deep understanding of the discourse between musician and listener, I drew on various theorists which covered aspects like lyrical text, performance, use of accent and authenticity. This generally came from books by Simon Frith, Dave Machin, John Connell and Chris Gibson. I was able to apply some of these theories to the Two-tone bands, particularly as some of the theories included commentary on punk music.

Autobiographies of various band members are available which provide useful reading matter in gaining a subjective insight first hand into what inspired the bands, how and where they formed. I carried out face-to-face interviews with band members Roddy Byers from The Specials and Dave Wakeling from The Beat which have also been excellent primary sources of information, being able to obtain information directly relating to my objectives. I have transcribed most of the first interview I had with Roddy Byers in September 2015, as an appendix. There was a panel discussion called 'Three Minute Heroes' at Warwick University in October 2015 which included two band members; Pauline Black from The Selecter and Horace Panter from The Specials, together with authors and academics who have written about this era. The panel discussion included a Q&A session afterwards, which was very useful to my research, providing first-hand material and a contextual view of Two-tone.

From the primary source material of interviews I had with band members, autobiographies, records of interviews given by bands during the Two-tone heyday and the panel discussion event, I was able to triangulate it with the written historical sources in order to demonstrate the relationship between the Two-tone genre, the time (late 1970s/early 1980s) and the place, West Midlands.

CHAPTER 1 SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

This chapter discusses the political climate during the 1970s/early 1980s, to provide a background to some of the expression of political dissent in the emergence of Two-tone music. A number of factors made the period particularly turbulent, all of which contributed to a particularly volatile economic scenario. Inflation often reached very high levels, the three day week was introduced; there was an oil crisis, frequent strikes, floating exchange rates and rising unemployment. When Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government was elected in 1979 she introduced an economic policy which resulted in a very sharp increase in what was already a growing rise in unemployment. The West Midlands was one of the most badly affected regions in the country and lyrics of many of the Two-tone songs highlighted this problem.

The West Midlands suffered a particularly sharp rise in unemployment during this period due mainly to the decline in the motor industry and unemployment featured heavily in the lyrics of Two-tone songs. This chapter provides a general historical background to the evolution and decline of manufacturing in the West Midlands and more particularly Birmingham and Coventry, as Coventry was where Two-tone was formed. It shows how the car industry changed dramatically throughout the 1960s/1970s from a booming industry to a shadow of its former self. The early boom years of the motor industry in the region (1950s and 1960s), witnessed a demand for labour to fill jobs, leading to the migration of a large population from the Caribbean to Birmingham and Coventry.

To a great extent the post-war boom was the result of the implementation of Keynesian principles. The Keynes system, named after J M Keynes, an economist during the first half of the 20th Century, dominated the economic policies of both of the main political parties in the UK and elsewhere in Western Europe after the

Second World War. The economic system required governments taking a role to intervene in ensuring sufficient demand in the economy to maintain full employment; the implication being that governments could achieve this by managing demand through the use of public spending and changes in taxation (Jones & Robins 1992: 222). An example of the Keynesian intervention policy was the Labour Government's assumed control of the West Midlands based motor company, British Leyland, when it had run out of credit in 1975 (Bardsley and Corke 2006: 130).

The oil crisis was one of the major factors influencing the state of the economy in the 1970s. The average rate of inflation between 1967 and 1978 in the UK was 10.5%, whereas for the OECD (advanced industrialised western countries) it was 7.1%. Both of these figures increased even further during the period 1974-1975 when the price of oil quadrupled (Whiteley 1983: 132). In the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli War in 1973, the oil producing countries, most of which were in the Middle East, greatly increased the price of oil, a move which had disastrous effects on the economics of the Western countries. Rising oil prices resulted in increased costs for fuel and transport, higher inflation and rising social discontent.

Stagflation was a new phenomenon (and new word invented at the time) which was used to describe a combination of high inflation coupled with high unemployment. With government(s) unable to control inflation, unemployment and interest rates in the 1970s, the Keynesian model struggled to accommodate this set of circumstances. During the early 1980s both UK and US governments under Thatcher and Reagan altered their economic policies, dismissing many of their predecessors policies under the Keynesian model, instead bringing in new monetarist policies aligned to the ideas of a free market and less government intervention (Gaffikin and Warf 1993: 67). To some Conservatives the 1979 election victory marked a break with the post-war consensus regarding a Welfare State and state intervention in industry (Evans and Taylor 1996: 213), in other words a break

from socialism in favour of monetarism, prioritising the reduction of inflation, at a cost of rising unemployment. During the previous winter of 1978-79 the country was in turmoil leading to the term 'Winter of Discontent' being used to describe the prevailing social and industrial chaos. Various groups of workers went on strike, demanding higher pay increases than the pay limit that had been set by the Government to try to lower inflation (BBC 2008). Public service workers, including school support staff, ambulance staff, refuse collectors, transport staff, hospital staff and BBC electricians all went on strike, leading to general chaos with piles of rubbish mounting in town centres, escalating health issues and school closures. (Marr 2007: 376). This whole troubled scenario helped to bring about a change of government the following year.

Deindustrialisation in the UK started to happen on a large scale and at a rapid rate during the 1970s and as such, unemployment rose through the decade.

Unemployment between 1978 and 1983 then grew very sharply – between May 1979 and October 1981, the heyday of Two-tone, unemployment went from just under 1.3 million to over double that figure (Thorpe 2008: 210). According to Lord Scarman's report on the Brixton riots in 1981, for which unemployment was recognised as a key factor, in the twelve months leading to February 1981 total unemployment in Great Britain increased by nearly 66% (Scarman 1986: 27).

The West Midlands was particularly affected by the decline of the manufacturing industries, especially in the motor industry, an employment sector which had attracted a significant migrant workforce. During the 1970s the West Midlands had the lowest economic growth of any UK region and in the early 1980s suffered the highest increase in unemployment (Donnelly Begley and Collis 2012: 4). Between 1971 and 1981 the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per head in the West Midlands fell from 102.7% of the UK average to 90.6%, the worst of any region (Healey and Clark 1984: 303). By January 1983, 16.6% of the working population of the West

Midlands was unemployed (Healey and Clark 1984: 305). This is in sharp contrast to the economic landscape of the 1950s and 1960s when Coventry was described as a boom town and unemployment rates in the City were often below 1%.

It is not surprising that West Midlands bands were venting their frustration with the political situation as the region had suffered the most. As well as lyrics contained in music by Two-tone bands, one of the best known songs relating to unemployment at that time, was 'One In Ten' released in 1981 by another Birmingham band, UB40. The name UB40 was taken from the name of the unemployment form and the statistic one in ten relates to the ten per cent unemployment rate in the region at the time.

Birmingham was the second largest city in the UK and Coventry the ninth. The two major cities of the West Midlands, are similar but at the same time different from each other. Coventry is the most senior of the two. By the 14th century it was the fourth largest town in England, its prosperity based largely on textiles. It retained a medieval appearance and street pattern until the destruction wrought by the Luftwaffe on the night of 14-15 November 1940. Birmingham by comparison was a newcomer. Until the 18th century it was a relatively small town but, with the vast mineral resources of the Black Country on its doorstep, it expanded rapidly during the Industrial Revolution to become one of the world's foremost manufacturing centres. By the early part of the 20th century, it had become the second largest city in the country.

The growth of the West Midlands as an industrial region was to be an important influence on Two-tone. Many of the band members migrated to England from the West Indies as children and Ranking Roger from The Beat, was born in Birmingham to parents who had migrated from Jamaica. In the early 20th century both cities had a large engineering base and major car industries and because of this the West

Midlands avoided the decline and mass unemployment that affected most of Britain's other traditional industrial areas in the inter-war years (Taylor 1980: 65). This prosperity continued throughout the 1950s and 1960s when Birmingham and Coventry experienced a huge economic expansion after the Second World War.

During the previous two decades, after recovering from the Second World War, Britain in general had started to prosper, and in some areas and industries, there were more jobs available than people to fill them. Osgerby describes this era as seeming like a dawning of a new era, with a growth in prosperity and living standards. The full employment and demand for labour meant that there was substantial and sustained rise in wages which resulted in a growth in consumerism. A growing number of working class households bought televisions, cars and other domestic items (Osgerby 1998: 30-31). This coincided with the mass production of such items like washing machines and televisions. Osgerby notes that this period seemed to be moving into a classlessness, obscuring of social divisions as there was more of an overlap of incomes between blue and white-collar workers (Osgerby 1998: 31).

Amongst the groups who enjoyed this new-found prosperity was the youth. The mid-1950s saw the birth of the 'teenager' with the onset of rock'n'roll and portrayal of this exciting new force in cinema with films featuring James Dean, Marlon Brando and films based on rock'n'roll music itself, *Blackboard Jungle*, *Rock Around the Clock*. Teenagers, Osgerby suggests, were presented as a class in themselves whose vibrant, hedonistic culture seemed to be a foretaste of good times about to come for everyone (Osgerby 1998:37).

The demand for labour during the 1950s and 1960s attracted many migrants from the West Indies to Britain over this period. This movement had its roots in the war when West Indians came to Britain either to serve in the armed forces or in industry.

Manufacturing sectors that attracted a particularly large number of West Indian workers were the West Midlands based construction and car industries (Peach 1967: 44). The West Indian migrants settled in clusters generally moving to inner city areas where heavy industry was based.

The immigrant population in Birmingham, mainly from the Caribbean, rose from about 5,000 in 1951 to around 68,000 in 1971 (Woods 1979: 455). As a result by 1971 Birmingham had the largest black population outside London (Ward 1978: 468). In 1951, Coventry had a population of 258,245 and by 1961 the population had grown to 305,521. Between 1951 and 1971 approximately 25% of the growth of Coventry was due to net migration into the area (Coventry City Council: 1986).

The immigrant population faced problems, however. For example the Notting Hill riots of 1958, described by Marr as a “large and deeply unpleasant outbreak of anti-immigrant violence” ran for six days (Marr 2007: 198). Enoch Powell, a Conservative MP, gave the notorious ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech in Birmingham in April 1968, where he had appealed for a “return to a historic vision of English identity rather than a steady progress towards a multi-cultural society” (Parker and Freathy 2012: 384). The National Front, an extreme right-wing party, formed in the late 1960s whose policies included the “compulsory repatriation of black and Asian immigrants” (Osgersby 1998: 130), and was a growing force during the 1970s and would be referenced in many anti-racist Two-tone songs. The National Front did not win any parliamentary seats in the 1970s, but according to assessment carried out by Parker and Freathy, membership of the National Front rose from 4,000 in 1968 to 17,500 in 1972. This, along with increasing tensions around inequality around opportunities in the workplace and unemployment amongst the African-Caribbean and Asian population, created a situation of “tangible and fear-invoking racial dissent” (Parker and Freathy 2012: 384). In 1978 a study of white youths from

Hackney and Shoreditch found that 25% of the sample were committed to, or prepared to support, the National Front (Osgerby 1998: 130).

As the economic situation worsened during the 1970s and the unemployment situation became particularly acute at the turn of the decade, Rex describes an “alienation of educated white youth” from the establishment and an emergence of deviant working class youth subcultures, some of whom formed an attachment to the anti-racism causes, others, on the other hand, being “impregnated with racism” (Rex 1982: 105). The Two-tone bands incorporated anti-racist lyrics in some of their songs and participated in Rock Against Racism concerts but were aware that there was a small racist element amongst some of their fans. Pauline Black, lead singer of The Selecter, described in her autobiography how some Two-tone gigs were targeted by members of the National Front hiding “among the skinhead fraternity” and that these elements would cause trouble, start fights and would shout ‘Sieg Heil’ at the stage. This behaviour, Black states, “increased in frequency and ferocity” (Black 2011: 157). Neol Davies, cited in Daniel Rachel’s book, remembers that “most skinheads weren’t racist troublemakers but that there was a confused core that loved ska but hated the guys who made it” (Rachel 2016: 262).

The Specials song ‘Concrete Jungle’ is an example of lyrics where the National Front is actually mentioned in the lines: “I have to carry a knife, because there’s people threatening my life; I can’t dress just the way I want, I’m being chased by the National Front” (The Specials 1979). In an interview with Roddy Byers of The Specials who wrote the song, he explained to me how at the time of writing, he lived near a football ground and experienced scenes of tension on the streets between rival football fans, particularly after a match. He remembered that some groups of youths did not need much of an excuse to start fighting – both the music tribes and rival football team fans, would often fight each other (Byers 2016).

Due to a combination of internal arguments, the Conservative move to the right and the work of anti-racist movements such as Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League, the National Front declined sharply by the 1980s. Rock Against Racism began in 1976 with the organisation of events featuring bands mainly from the punk and reggae genres playing on the same bill, allowing bands and audiences to join forces under the anti-racist banner. By the time Two-tone emerged in 1979, the Organisation had put on around 800 gigs under the banner of 'Love Music, Hate Racism'. Two members of the RAR collective were interviewed for the NME in March 1979 and explained that they wanted to form a rank and file movement with musicians against racism, which had been increasing at that time (Mackinnon and Murray 1979). The Organisation's politics were "immediate, tied to music and the hip aspects of youth culture", illustrating the power of music in informing political activism (Zuberi 2001: 187). Zuberi, for example, observes how when he attended a rally in Trafalgar Square against nuclear weapons, while the political message was powerful, it was the fact that there was going to be a music concert that helped to motivate him to make the early morning journey from West Yorkshire to London (Zuberi 2001: 187). The Labour party adopted a version of the slogan for an advertisement in their 1979 campaign, which appeared in a copy of the NME in April which read 'Don't Just Rock Against Racism, Vote Against It' (NME 1979).

During the 1970s there was a movement towards racial equality. This occurred after the Race Relations Act, originally introduced in 1965, was reformed in 1976, to provide more legislation against racial discrimination. Discrimination often occurred in housing and employment; and jobs that were mostly offered to migrant workers were often lower in status and pay than they were qualified for in areas like the health service, council, and transport system. Marr comments, however, that in the West Midlands in particular, black migrants did gain a foothold in the car making factories and other manufacturing industries (Marr 2007: 197). A Birmingham factory worker, Bill Morris, originally from Jamaica, became Britain's first black trade

union leader of Britain's largest union, the Transport & General Workers Union (Birmingham Evening Mail 1973). It seems that the car industry had a better policy on equality than many other places of work and according to Ratcliffe, many of the assembly line jobs in the car industry were the same for black and white employees. He does, however, note that more West Indian workers were involved in shift work which was considered to be less desirable and unpopular, albeit better paid (Ratcliffe 1981: 259). These skilled and semi-skilled jobs that both black and white employees were doing in the car plants, under relatively equal conditions, would have created a norm, a natural state of affairs with regard to integration which would naturally spill over into leisure and home life.

Children of the West Indian population which migrated to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s were going to school with white children and there was a cross-fertilisation of cultures in some areas. This generation of migrants, many of whom were born as well as brought up in the UK, had a different approach to their parents and were less willing to tolerate the racism that their parents had. Reggae music was full of anti-oppression lyrics and seemed to act as a voice throughout the 1970s for this generation. Ward suggested that many of the migrants moving to the UK during the 1950s and 1960s who still saw themselves (at the time) primarily as West Indians, Indians and Pakistanis were "reasonably satisfied with what was...an...improvement in their standard of living compared to ..their countries of origin" (Ward 1978: 468). However, some of their children did not feel the same – they had higher aspirations, much like the white working class youth, growing up in the optimistic and booming 1950s/1960s, and were not satisfied with the "opportunities open to them" especially at work (Ward 1978: 468). When Gilroy contrasts the reasons for the 1981 riots to the 2011 riots he suggests that one of the explanations emerging across agencies regarding identity conflict in black communities was differences in generational attitudes, mentioned previously, mainly between the older outlook of the immigrant parents and the "more modern" outlook of their locally born children (Gilroy 2013:

554). Many of the Two-tone band members as children migrated with their families from the Caribbean to England in the 1950s and 1960s.

With the growing unemployment situation, black youth found themselves 'doubly hit'. As they were often the first to become unemployed or to be denied employment in the first place, according to Chambers many were spending their time on inner city streets with little to do (Chambers 1985: 166). His observations are backed by research based on evidence published by the Department of Employment which showed that in 1985 the unemployment rate was roughly double for black people as for white. In the West Midlands the extent of unemployment was even worse, with 13% of white people out of work compared to 32% West Indian and 28% Asian. During the 1960s and 1970s stop and search or the 'sus' law, was in force, representing a "harsher style of policing and a law which was widely regarded as liberally applied to arrest black youths" (Chambers 1985: 172). Again, this is a topic that is included in lyrics of Two-tone songs which will be discussed later. From a report carried out in 1978, the police in Handsworth estimated that less than 2% of the West Indian population were involved in crimes against people and property, yet almost all young West Indians lived with a constant fear of being stopped and questioned by the police and had little expectation of just treatment (Bishton Homer Nanton, Stewart 1978).

Britain's inner city areas started to decline throughout the 1970s. The high land values associated with inner-city sites led some firms experiencing declining profits, to sell off their city centre premises in order to provide capital for new machinery, notably in the case of cities such as London, Birmingham and Manchester (Evans and Eversley 1980: 121). To a certain extent, industrial decline correlated with a declining population, a shift exacerbated by the steady migration from Britain's inner cities to suburban areas starting in the 1960s. At the time, increasing household incomes meant higher expectations for residential space with large gardens which

the outer suburbs could offer. There was a further deterioration in urban environments due to increasing traffic congestion, with an increase in car ownership during the 1960s. From the context of living conditions, therefore, Britain's inner cities/conurbations were increasingly being seen by middle and higher income families as less desirable than suburban locations (Evans and Eversley 1980: 122). During the 1970s and 1980s inner city areas were becoming repositories for the unskilled, ethnic minorities, the elderly and disadvantaged. Unemployment was high and housing conditions were often poor.

According to Cashmore there was a disintegration of the traditional working class community when neighbourhoods were split as post-war urban developments took hold. Many high-rise tower block estates were built in the inner cities thus breaking up the old communities (Cashmore 1984: 79). Also, in the early 1960s the demand for labour in manufacturing levelled out and immigration started to exceed this demand. The housing market in Birmingham, particularly, was tight, due in part, to the extensive damage caused by bombing in the War. It resulted in dense occupation of inner area housing (Ward 1978: 469). The statistics from the Department of Employment of the employment pattern in Birmingham in 1971 and changes evidenced between 1951 and 1971 made it clear that the employment prosperity that was evident in Birmingham in the early 1960s had disappeared by 1971 (Evans and Eversley 1980: 333). As with other cities in the UK, conditions were often poor for the migrant families. Housing was often inadequate and new arrivals were often grouped together in rundown inner cities, where not only living conditions were very poor but they often found themselves the objects of exploitation (Edmead 1999: 20). Various associations were set up at this time in Birmingham – The *Birmingham Evening Mail* reported that an Immigration Liaison Committee would be set up to assist integration into fringe areas of Birmingham. The Sparkbrook Association was formed in 1960 to promote the wellbeing of people in Sparkbrook, an area with a diverse population, to improve health, housing facilities

and give social advice (Birmingham Evening Mail 1966). A Birmingham African-Caribbean Organisation was set up with Henry Gunter as its secretary. He had come to Birmingham from Jamaica in 1949 and was active within his Trade Union. He was the first black member to be elected as Branch Secretary and the first black member of the Birmingham Trades Council.

The major cities that attracted large numbers of migrants had areas, in the case of West Indian migrants usually based in the inner city, that were home to the vast majority. In 1979 Woods explored segregation and integration of the immigrant population in Birmingham during the 1950s and 1960s and found that West Indian and Irish immigrants more 'closely (spatially) matched the pattern of the total population' (than Asians, Indians, Pakistanis, Cypriots etc.) He suggested that in Birmingham, the West Indian population was becoming "less segregated and more dispersed throughout the city" than other ethnic groups. (Woods 1979: 464). In a study of Sparkbrook undertaken in 1967, it was found that in terms of leisure time the Indian and Pakistani children kept themselves almost completely separate from white children outside school, and that the pattern was much more mixed for West Indian and white children (Rex & Moore 1967: 249).

For a period of a few years from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s, Birmingham City Council brought in a policy of racial dispersal for housing tenants, with the intention of assisting racial integration in the city and trying to avoid ghettoised areas. The general principles of the policy were supported at a national level though it was abandoned in 1975 due to the mechanical and set ratio system of implementation. After a few years of this policy it was agreed that forced dispersal was not desirable. During the few years that this policy was in place, there was more movement of black tenants into predominantly white, outer-ring suburbs, though not as much as originally anticipated (Flett Hendrickson & Brown 1979: 293-294). This relatively short period of racial dispersal imposed by the Council, although eventually being

deemed as undesirable, could well have helped in the later music map of the City in terms of the black and white mix in various venues. Woods' paper suggested that due to an 'enhanced degree of spatial mixing' the potential for the West Indian population to socialise with their white neighbours had improved (Woods 1979: 464). This is particularly interesting and suggests that the West Midlands was an area that provided an ideal climate for the mixing of black and white cultures – for exposure to different sounds that were popular to black and white youth at the time.

Ward contrasts Manchester with Birmingham illustrating that Manchester drew in smaller numbers of black migrants from a wider range of countries more gradually, unlike Birmingham which saw a large inflow from the Caribbean from the mid-1950s (Ward 1978: 469). This correlates with there being a significant community of people from Jamaica, of a similar age, all having moved at a similar time, living in Birmingham. Among heads of migrant households interviewed in Birmingham in 1966 only 16% or less were aged 45 or older whereas 70-80% were between 25 to 44. This contrasts sharply with proportions in the rest of the UK as comparable UK proportions were 60% who were 45 or over and 36% between 25 and 44 (Rose 1969: 183-184). This is the group whose children were the age of the Two-tone band members, growing up in the West Midlands going to the same schools as their white neighbours and absorbing each other's cultures.

As Birmingham was one of the first major cities to experience religious and ethnic diversity and, because of the increasing number of children of immigrant origin in Birmingham schools, a Birmingham Agreed Syllabus for Religious Instruction (BAS) was produced in 1975, which was regarded as one of the 'most radical' proposals in the UK, via syllabus, to 'introduce children from an early age to other world religions' (Parker and Freathy 2012: 389-390). Multi-faith material had been included in the previous decade in Yorkshire and London, but Birmingham was the first to include world religions in considerable measure and would "meet the complex religious and

cultural needs of a large multicultural and multi-faith city” (Parker and Freathy 2012: 389-390). Indeed an article in the *Birmingham Evening Post* in 1973 reported that black children in Birmingham and Walsall had a better chance of avoiding a school for the educationally ‘subnormal’ than in many other cities. It cited the findings in that month’s issue of *Race Today* and reported that the officer employed in this area in Birmingham ‘pursues a ruthless equality of educational opportunity and provisions’ (Birmingham Evening Post 1973). This would indicate that during the 1970s Birmingham was more forward thinking than other regions of the UK with regard to its ethnic population. This also suggests a higher level of integration of the black community with the white population.

The car industry in particular was a major part of the West Midlands post-war economy. According to Donnelly, Begley and Collis, car manufacturers such as Rootes, Austin, Jaguar, Standard and lots of others, despite the unpredictability of the trade cycle and two World Wars taking place, boomed in the West Midlands with “the region being weather vane for measuring Health of UK manufacturing” (Donnelly, Begley and Collis 2012: 4). Indeed such was the size and importance of the West Midlands car industry to the country that Pauline Black from The Selecter mentions that when announcing to her father she was moving to Coventry (from Romford) to study, his first reaction was to list names of various car manufacturers based in the City – Armstrong-Siddeley, Lanchester, Rolls-Royce, Daimler, Triumph, Ford and so on. (Black 2011: 87).

Unions in the car industry were strong and management wanted to keep production moving so were prepared to pay high prices. In the 1960s the West Midlands was seen as a “high employment, high wage sub-economy” with the earnings of its workers becoming “legendary”. Wages of male manual workers in the region by the mid-1960s were more than 17% above the national average (Taylor 1981: 66). These high wages amongst many of the working class in the area meant that a

vibrant nightlife existed in both cities as workers had a lot to spend on leisure activities.

During the 1970s, however, the domestic car industry went into sharp decline. There seems to be a number of reasons for its demise in the West Midlands (and the UK in general) during this time. These include frequent trade union disputes, poor management, de-industrialisation, which “gathered pace at a rate wholly exceptional by European standards” (Wilks 1984: 75); importation of cars from other countries (Coventry Transport Museum: (nd) 42).

Another factor was regional policy, whereby governments tried to even out some of the differences in manufacturing; the West Midlands together with London were seen as sources of industry for assisted areas. Large multi-plant firms, many of which were located in London and Birmingham, were given incentives to move and expand production to assisted areas (Evans and Eversley 1980: 147). Two examples include the opening of Rootes, a Coventry based firm, of a car plant at Linwood in Glasgow and then Standard-Triumph, another Coventry based motor-manufacturer, opening a plant in Speke, Merseyside. It was estimated that at least 39,000 jobs were diverted under this policy from the West Midlands during the period 1960-1974 (Healey and Clark 1984: 309). The extent of dependency of assisted areas in the South East and West Midlands is illustrated by the following facts. The South East was the source of 47% of all inter-regional movement, in terms of employment for the period 1945-1965, followed by West Midlands’ contribution of 20%. London and Birmingham were affected significantly because they were non-assisted conurbations. The Government’s regional policy was blamed in the West Midlands both for the decline and problems of the inner city. As unemployment rose, voices of regionalism grew louder and according to a report published in 1977 by the Birmingham Community Development Project Research Team, many people held the view that Birmingham “is the heart of Britain’s industry

so the health of the rest of the country depends on its health". Brian Walden, then MP for Birmingham Ladywood, had been quoted in a newspaper article in 1976 as saying "I maintain that Birmingham is not allowed to exercise its skills to the full – what regional policy means is that Birmingham is prevented from doing work that it does well, industrialists being bribed to send the work elsewhere" (Walden 1976 cited in BCDPRT 1977).

The decline of the motor industry in the UK was illustrated by the changing fortunes of British Leyland. It was formed from the merging of eight major motor companies in the 1960s and became the largest exporting company in the UK with 40% of the UK market - in 1969 its sales worldwide were worth £970,000,000 (*The Economist* 1970). In the late 1960s Longbridge in Birmingham was the world's largest car plant but a few decades later, by 2005, MG Rover, British Leyland's successor, had just 3% of the UK market (Wheeler 2005). The motorcycle industry also declined, partly due to Japanese makes increasing in the market share and the company BSA, based in Birmingham, was badly affected. The motor industry used other firms for component parts and companies such as Dunlop, a tyre manufacturer with large plants in the West Midlands and Lucas, a Birmingham engineering firm, described as a colossus in the world of component suppliers, were also, therefore, affected by the decline in the manufacturing industry through the 1970s. Neol Davies from The Selecter was working at Lucas when he wrote the song 'Too Much Pressure'.

Imported vehicles accounted for under 11% of new car registrations throughout the 1960s, but rose rapidly throughout the 1970s, to around 60% by 1980. For example, in 1960 Japan produced 165,094 cars but in 1970 this had risen to 3 million (*The Economist* 1970). An article in *The Economist* states that car imports into the UK went up by 42% in the first 10 months of 1973, with Japan being the leading importer, but the UK's exports only increased by 17%. The article puts the

blame for this on more than 400,000 cars being lost through strike action (*The Economist* 1973).

Accompanying redundancy as a source of unemployment in the West Midlands area, was an increase in the size of the population looking for their first job. The prosperity and demand for labour/high employment in the West Midlands that attracted migration into the region during the previous couple of decades meant that migrants during this time were generally in their twenties and thirties, settled and had families. So, sixteen, seventeen years later the number of school-leaving age youth in the area, who were looking for work, was above the national average population of that age group compared to other regions. This situation, compounded with the motor industry sharply going into decline, meant that unemployment amongst the young was also higher than in other regions for that age group (Taylor 1981: 67). Two-tone band members were exposed to this situation and the topic of unemployment/unsatisfactory job prospects would soon crop up in the lyrics of songs.

In 1981 there were riots or serious incidents of civil unrest in 35 different places in the UK, including major rioting in Brixton (London), Toxteth, (Liverpool) and Moss Side (Manchester) (Peach 1986: 596). These disturbances occurred in a short period of time with some places experiencing several incidents, between April and July. Benyon and Solomos suggested five common contributing characteristics in the areas where riots occurred. These were racial disadvantage and discrimination, high unemployment, widespread deprivation, political exclusion and powerlessness, and widespread mistrust of, and hostility to, the police (Benyon & Solomos 1988: 414). In the light of the Brixton riots in April of that year, Lord Scarman was commissioned by the Home Office to produce a report. In the report he mentions in general inner city decline within the wider context of “underlying national economic decline” as important reasons for the disturbances (Scarman 1986: 158).

According to Paul Gilroy's paper the rioting that took place in 1981 was rooted in young people's experiences of inequality and injustice. It was also shaped by a sense of extreme crisis and the forces "unleashed by accelerating deindustrialisation of urban zones", all of which created a sense of hopelessness (Gilroy 2013: 552). He quotes a *New York Times* article which reported that "spreading urban violence erupted in more than a dozen (UK) cities and towns" in a 24 hour period and a situation described by a senior government minister as 'anarchy' in some cities (Gilroy 2013: 552-553). On the Thursday leading up to the worst weekend of rioting, the *Coventry Evening Telegraph's* headline was 'Pressure grows for using troops – Riots Close to Anarchy' (Coventry Evening Telegraph 1981).

This research gives an insight into some of the turbulence that took place during the 1970s in the UK. It puts into context some of the topics that would be covered by the Two-tone bands especially around unemployment and racism. Being based in the West Midlands, meant that the members were witnessing the sharp rise in unemployment and the decline of its main industry. Also, as many of the band members had migrated to England from the Caribbean, they were exposed to both cultures and directly experiencing racism and greater chance of unemployment.

CHAPTER 2 - MUSICAL INFLUENCES

In the first part of this chapter I will give a brief history of the two genres of punk and reggae/ska music which were the precursors and main influence upon the Two-tone sound. Punk music in the UK started around 1976 and had begun to wane by late 1978, reggae music emanating from Jamaica started to break into the mainstream in Britain during the mid-1970s. Although the sounds of the genres were very different, reggae being slow with an off-beat, punk with a fast, frantic pace, both included lyrics relating to political and social issues, for example Bob Marley and The Wailers' 'Get Up Stand Up' (1973), a song about fighting against oppression and The Sex Pistols' 'Anarchy in the UK' (1976) a song about the bleakness of the future. Some of these issues related to racism and artists from both the reggae and punk genres united in solidarity to perform at Rock Against Racism concerts, a synergy which illustrates a shared sense of political agency. I will show how Two-tone bands continued to uphold lyrics that reflected social and political issues and particularly in the years between 1979-1981, a period of political change and riots on Britain's streets.

In the second section I will explore some of the venues in the West Midlands that were important to the emergence of Two-tone, including nightclubs where there was a fusion of punk and reggae music. I will contextualise this with Hebdige and Jones's work to argue that conditions in Birmingham and Coventry allowed a fusion of black and white music to come together. The section will invoke theories around place and the city, in particular Connell and Gibson's work and apply them to the West Midlands during the 1970s.

2.1 Reggae/Ska

The Two-tone sound had strong associations with ska music, an early form of reggae, developed in Jamaica in the 1960s. Ska music was influenced mainly by American rhythm and blues (R&B), modern jazz, African drums, mento, calypso and other indigenous forms (Augustyn 2013:29). The R&B that could be heard in Jamaica via radio stations from the Southern states of the USA had a “relaxed, loping style” which appealed to the West Indian taste for “unhurried rhythms” (Hebdige 2000: 62). According to Hebdige, the R&B from the Southern states of the USA, almost had a “Caribbean tinge”, notably with shuffle rhythms from New Orleans (Hebdige 2000: 62). Kauppila describes the New Orleans R&B as having relaxed, piano and horn-led melodies (Kauppila 2006: 75-91).

The organ and horn sounds were particularly prominent in Two-tone music. One of the elements of the ska sound was what was referred to as “lonely sounding horns” – a signature sound featured in a number of the Two-tone songs, and particularly evident in the work of Saxa, a Jamaican ska musician who played the catchy horn sounds in The Beat’s ‘Mirror in the Bathroom’. Likewise, Rodriguez’s memorable trombone solo in The Specials’ ‘Ghost Town’ described by Zuberi as “giving the track a dead gravity” (Zuberi 2001: 188).

Music reached the local Jamaican community via sound systems and large mobile discotheques, set up in Jamaica to play the imported music at events known as blues dances. By the late 1950s the R&B music being imported to Jamaica from the United States was waning for various reasons, including an economic recession, at which point local people began to produce their own music (Hebdige 2000: 65). Sound system owners financed the recordings, known as ‘rudie blues’ which were mostly instrumental cover versions of the old R&B songs or original New Orleans-style compositions, mixed with sounds that had become popular locally like burru

drumming, originating from an African tradition, in a process involved known as dubbing. Disc jockeys provided the vocal accompaniment over the track at the blues dances, which was known as scatting or toasting (Hebdige 2000: 65). These recordings, which were a relatively cheap way to be creative by re-using existing rhythm tracks, became known as 'specials' for the sound systems (Partridge 2008: 319). During these recordings the sound became modified, the shuffle rhythms were flattened out, the beats evened out more and instruments lingered on the off beat – in what became known as ska (Hebdige 2000: 65).

In Jamaica, toasting was used by disc jockeys as an opportunity to comment on current political and social issues, by acting as a "spokesperson for the ghetto communities, providing the voice of resistance" (Partridge 2008: 319). This technique was adopted by Two-Tone artists, in particular Ranking Roger of The Beat and Neville Staple of The Specials. Roger became well known for his toasting on the local Birmingham scene and was a regular at Barbarellas nightclub in the city centre and one of the bands that Roger toasted with on stage was UB40, until he joined The Beat (Marshall 1993: 37). Like Ranking Roger, Neville Staple from The Specials was also a keen toaster and his invitation to join The Specials came when he was heard toasting over a song on the band's tour with The Clash whilst employed as a roadie (Panter 2008: 46). Two-tone drew on the toasting tradition by incorporating political and social issues into the lyrics, to provide a voice of resistance. Staples ran a sound system from a Coventry youth club for a while and enthuses in his book that his inspiration for his dj style of toasting "was Jamaican artists like U-Roy and Dennis Alcapone" (Staple 2009: 78). Also, Charley Anderson of The Selecter disc-jockeyed, playing in sound system competitions around the Midlands before The Selecter formed (Eddington 2004: 88).

Prince Buster, a successful Jamaican disc jockey and recording artist, ran a celebrated sound system in Jamaica in the early 1960s. His influence on the British

scene was honoured by Madness who paid tribute to the artist with their only song released on the Two-tone label, entitled 'Prince', referencing the original 1960s ska scene " ..this may not be uptown Jamaica".

The music from Jamaica that started to really appeal in the UK during the 1970s was reggae, ska's slower successor, notably evidenced in the work of Bob Marley & The Wailers, amongst others. Bob Marley was signed to Island Records in 1972, owned by Chris Blackwell, which was an important and influential label in helping to bring reggae into the mainstream charts (Eddington 2004: 45). Their popularity meant that they played to large, racially mixed audiences in London, Birmingham and Manchester in 1975 (Jones 1988: 94). Whereas early ska had a fast and jerky dance sound, the style began to slow down during the late 1960s, with more emphasis placed on a deeper bass leading gradually to the reggae sound (Hebdige 2000: 75). According to Heathcott, one of the reasons for this slowing down was that during the very hot summer of 1966 in the Caribbean, the fast ska beat exacerbated tensions in the dance halls and in order to keep things harmonious the ska musicians slowed down the tempo. This sound caught on and became known as rocksteady. Eventually the style evolved to become reggae, when musical changes were made in the shape of less emphasis being placed on brass, but still retaining the off-beat (Heathcott 2003: 196-197).

This directly correlates to what the Two-tone groups said regarding their main rationale for incorporating the earlier ska with punk, rather than the slower reggae sound that was, by the mid-1970s more contemporary. The tempo of punk was fast and did not "fit" with that of reggae whereas ska better matched the pace of punk. In Horace Panter's words: "Musically it meant our punky tunes could still be played fast, but with a swing that made them...more danceable...The new ska rhythm had a 4/4 beat but had to swing like reggae" (Panter 2007: 62).

Reggae was embraced by Black British youth who took meaning from it. For the sons and daughters of the Windrush generation, growing up in Britain, reggae music became a medium for the expression of defiance, “we rejected the caution and restraint our parents had in a hostile racial environment – we were the rebel generation – reggae offered us our own identity” (Linton Kwesi-Johnson 2011). Daynes described reggae as music of resistance based on a rhetoric of oppression which, while influenced by the Rastafarian movement, was also adopted by others who did not necessarily adhere to the religion. Daynes explains that the rhetoric was rooted in the daily reality of the lives of poor people in Jamaica, not only describing it but “denouncing the conditions and criticising governments’ policies” (Daynes 2010: 197).

According to Hebdige by the end of the 1970s, many British reggae bands were singing themes about race, politics and policing in much the same way. As mentioned earlier, the National Front was referred to in some lyrics, for example Steel Pulse, a Birmingham reggae band, brought out the album *Handsworth Revolution* which was based around the everyday experiences in the Handsworth suburb of Birmingham. Hebdige refers to an explanation given by David Hinds from Steel Pulse who explained how reggae music compensated for the disappointment and lack of opportunities the youth faced when leaving school. He said that the future promised was now different and that if someone was black they don’t get much say in the way things are run outside music and that music becomes the message (Hebdige 2000: 99-100). Amlak Tafari of Steel Pulse explained that the songs contained on the album *Handsworth Revolution* contained lyrics taking a close look at the black community in Britain – unemployment, police harassment – and could sense that tension was increasing. He explained that following on from the anger of punk rock, their politics tried to be more solution-based (Tafari 2012). During the late 1970s and early 1980s, Hebdige also observes that whilst many British reggae groups included themes of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie and Back to

Africa, other lyrics referred to what was going on in Britain, especially conditions for the black community. As well as Steel Pulse's lyrics on Handsworth, Hebdige uses the example of Aswad's 'Can't Walk the Streets' as a commentary on police harassment in London and the 'sus' law (Hebdige 2000: 100). Similar rhetoric was also taken up by Two-tone bands in the lyrics to many of their songs. Charlie Anderson from The Selecter explained in an interview that the group's aim was to have a good time and say something resonant about the circumstances. He said that the lyrics in the song 'Danger' "I was only having some fun, and they come and take me away" was referring to the 'sus' law, though without actually mentioning it specifically as they felt it was a line that could apply to many people (Rambali 1979). As mentioned earlier, this law seemed to be being applied disproportionately to black youth during the 1970s.

2.2 Punk

Following its inception in 1976, the ska and reggae influences on Two-tone were augmented by the influence of punk rock. Many punk artists regarded bands who they'd admired in the past, (1960s/early 1970s) to now be "elitist" and that these millionaire rock stars didn't have much in common with the new generation of rock fans (Coon 1976: 193). Laing also describes the (mid-1970s) contemporary rock scene as, having become too "polished and opulent" – that producing music in the studios with the latest (expensive) technology had become overly important to many bands (Laing 1985: 7).

Another reaction to the pomposity of progressive rock was the pub rock scene, a precursor to punk, that started the move back to basics paving the way for Two-tone, flourishing during the early 1970s as a "reaction against...mainstream popular music" (Laing 1985: 7). The Hope and Anchor in Islington, later to become a

popular venue for second-wave ska, was one of the main scenes for pub rock, attracting “the cream of the pub rock bands” like Kilburn and the High Roads. The music was described by Chas de Whalley in NME as “a mix of country, rock’n’roll”, big band R&B, punk rock and soul – sometimes with a jazz influence” (de Whalley 1975). The pub rock scene was ideal for bands and pubs alike because the bands did not have to be too rehearsed or virtuoso in their performances and had a ready-made audience, as the pub customers were getting to see them for free. Roddy Byers of The Specials described a similar scenario in the West Midlands where there was a good amount of venues willing to allow upcoming bands to play (Byers 2016).

Soon afterwards punk rock emerged and immediately became regarded as an anti-establishment antithesis to the apparent elitism and indulgence of bands that had become prevalent on the music scene like Pink Floyd, Genesis, Emerson Lake & Palmer, Led Zeppelin. The punk musicians, including The Clash, Buzzcocks, The Damned etc. played regularly at various venues including London’s 100 Club on Oxford Street. Coon described the scene as exhibiting a “..certain arrogance and rebellious nature, with an exhilarating buzz” – making the audience feel as though they could also play like the bands on stage” (Coon 1976: 193). Reflecting on the prevailing enthusiasm for amateurism Conrad Schwartz from Birmingham punk band The Surprises reminisced in the documentary *Made in Birmingham: Reggae: Punk: Bangra* “There is that old cliché where if you could string two or three chords together you could be in a band, but it was a time when you could do that” (Schwartz 2012).

Coon compared the rebelliousness of the new punk rockers to previous rock stars like Elvis Presley in the 1950s and Mick Jagger in the 1960s – implying that the word rebel had been replaced with the word punk (Coon 1976: 195). Both Elvis Presley and Mick Jagger had been perceived as rebellious at the time – Presley’s

performance on the Ed Sullivan TV show in America in the late 1950s was filmed so that it would only show him from the waist up as his gyrations were considered to be too risqué for the American TV audience. Mick Jagger was briefly jailed in the 1960s for drugs possession.

Laing outlines what he considered to be the three main characteristics governing punk as: a do-it-yourself attitude which refused to rely on the institutions of the music industry; a challenge to the orthodoxy of artistic excellence in choice of musical style and an aggressive injection of new subject matter within songs (Laing 1985: 14). All three characteristics were to have a significant impact on the music scene from 1976, as other genres, sometimes collectively known as 'post punk', for example New Wave and Two-Tone, took aspects of these forms and were influenced, to varying degrees of extent, by the punk ethos and sound. The rebelliousness was nothing new, and neither was the do-it-yourself ethos, as skiffle music, for example, which was a pre-cursor to rock and roll during the 1950s, was very much about picking up anything to use as a musical instrument. Punk music though, and the behaviour often associated with it, was more anarchic than these earlier forms of music.

Political/social lyrics surfaced earlier in the work of artists such as Marvin Gaye, James Brown, Bob Dylan, Billie Holliday. James Brown, for example, wrote the funk song 'Say It Loud I'm Black and I'm Proud' in 1968 after the death of Martin Luther-King, which became an unofficial anthem of the Black Power movement (Doran 2015). However, the punk bands combined hard-hitting lyrics, such as "...God save the Queen, a fascist regime.... she's no human being" ('God Save the Queen' The Sex Pistols: 1977), with a snarling attitude and instantly recognisable, distinctive clothing, taking the shock factor to a new level. Chambers opines on the music, describing punk as "...crude, home-made white noise...as offensive to more normal pop as the indecipherable monotony of reggae's rumbling bass and choppy rhythms

was mysterious” (Chambers 1985: 178). The youthfulness, energy and attitude that punk portrayed, with the apparent lack of hi-tech production, appealed to much of the youth in Britain at that time and, as with the Two-tone band members, gave amateurs the enthusiasm and confidence to feel they too could be in a band.

The origins of the politicized character of Two-tone music can be traced back to the punk genre as well as reggae. In a piece of research that Laing carried out into the lyrical content of songs in the charts in 1976, 21% of punk songs contained lyrics on the subject ‘romantic and sexual relationships’, whereas 60% of the top 50 best-selling songs overall contained such lyrics. On ‘social and political comment’, 25% of the punk songs contained lyrics on that subject whereas only 4% of the top 50 singles did (Laing 1985: 27). This suggests that punk music represented some of the realities experienced by British youth, breaking down barriers between pop stars and audience. Contemporary social issues were a common source of lyrical content. Laing cites the example of The Clash’s ‘White Riot’, a song written after the Notting Hill Carnival in 1976, an event organised by the area’s West Indian population, which had ended in fights between black youth and the police (Laing 1985: 30). Two-tone band members embraced the relevance and reality of issues and showed a pragmatism within some of their lyrics; similarly their performances removed barriers further by allowing audience members to join them on stage. I would suggest that Two-tone songs, particularly those released by The Selecter, The Specials and The Beat during 1979-1981, contained a higher percentage of socio-political lyrics than Laing’s punk findings. This backs up the fact that the bands, although placing emphasis on the dance element of the music and wanting their audience to have fun, wrote a lot about what was going on around them. As economic decline took hold, the prospect of a lack of a bright future and increase in racism were prevalent in the West Midlands and wider UK at the time, and many of the lyrics reflect this.

Reasons for the distinction in subject matter in songs are put forward by Alwyn Turner who argues in the radio programme *Too Much Fighting On The Dancefloor*, how hard economic times bands tend to go one of two ways –those who like to articulate how bad things are and in the process, hopefully change it and those who offer escapism (BBC Radio 6 2015). Two-tone, following on from punk, definitely fitted into the former category as I will demonstrate in the section on lyrics.

Interestingly Cohen, in her book on the rock culture in Liverpool, was surprised by the number of bands in that city producing a more melodic, 'pop' music as opposed to 'angry' or 'overtly political music and reasons given include an escapist tendency of the Liverpool bands together with a cynicism with politics (Cohen 2001: 15). The economic situation in Liverpool during the 1980s had been particularly acute with Toxteth in Liverpool seeing some of the worst of the rioting that took place in July 1981. The plight of the city was reflected upon in The Specials' 'Ghost Town', which reached the top of the charts during the rioting. The song described the troubled state of the UK inner city scene, and Liverpool in particular, was one of the cities that, according to Dammers, had provided inspiration for some of the lyrics (Petridis 2002).

The punk and reggae communities started to come together during the mid-1970s. Both punk and reggae musicians took a stand against racism in song lyrics, notably when playing side by side at Rock Against Racism concerts. In Daniel Rachel's book *Wayne Minter*, an RAR committee member, enthuses that one of the best things about RAR was its DIY ethos and localism, where things were organised locally, with local bands and production. He remembers that there were often weekly meetings in RAR clubs in various cities in the UK and names, for example, The Beat and The Specials as regular participants at events organised in the Midlands (Rachel 2016: 204). Punk musicians had started to include lyrics on Britain's political situation in a similar way to reggae artists singing about the decline of Babylon (Hebdige 2000: 96). Also, as punk bands admired reggae music some

used the reggae sound in their own songs, for example The Clash's 'Police and Thieves' was a cover of a reggae hit for Junior Martin and Blondie did a cover of the ska song 'The Tide Is High', originally recorded by Jamaican group The Paragons. As The Specials joined The Clash on their 'On Parole' tour, the inclusion of reggae was a big influence on The Specials' sound (Rachel 2016: 242). When John Lydon's band The Sex Pistols signed with Virgin in 1977, the Company's enthusiasm for reggae music was a factor in the decision. Lydon recalls that in the mid-1970s he considered reggae to be the only other (besides punk) radical music that was underground. Don Letts, the dj and film-maker, took Lydon to The Four Aces in Dalston – regarded as the "heaviest reggae club in London" (Lydon: 1994: 280).

Jon Savage, in his book on punk rock 'England's Dreaming', comments on differences between some of the punk groups, particularly The Sex Pistols and The Clash. He suggests that punk began to develop a sociology and that The Clash was a good example in that unlike The Sex Pistols, who were based in the Soho/Chelsea areas of London, The Clash were "rooted" in North Kensington (Savage 1991: 231). By Savage's theory, therefore, The Clash could be perceived as being more down to earth, as the difference between North Kensington and Chelsea was more marked in the 1970s. Savage describes The Clash as "warmer, more of the people and closer to the dialogue of social concern and social realism" (Savage 1991: 231). Two-tone continued with this social realism dialogue; Lynval Golding, rhythm guitarist and vocalist with The Specials, for example, wrote the song 'Why?' in 1980 after being badly attacked in a racially-motivated assault, when coming out of a nightclub in London (Eddington 2004: 190).

Both reggae and punk in Britain were rooted in the city and in the city experience (Hebdige 2000: 96). Connell and Gibson describe punk as "claiming inner-city wastelands...rejecting suburbia, seeking credibility in the inner city" (Connell and

Gibson 2003: 77). Two-tone music, like most post-punk genres, was very much rooted in the city too – the music reflecting what was around them, in Birmingham and Coventry. Members of the three bands were living in central areas of Birmingham and Coventry whilst writing these songs. Roddy Byers told me that members of The Specials and Selecter lived in Coventry throughout their time together (Byers 2016). Dave Wakeling also told me that members of The Beat lived in Birmingham until the mid-1980s (Wakeling 2016).

Another genre of music that was prevalent during this time and emerged at more or less the same time as punk, also rooted in the city, was disco, with New York at its epicentre. Some of the main artists were Donna Summer, Chic, Chaka Khan and The Bee Gees and the film *Saturday Night Fever*, released in 1977, was based around the genre, the soundtrack to which sold several million copies. Disco was a phenomenon and could be heard everywhere. Even some heavyweight singers/bands who were associated with other forms of music dabbled in disco at the time, including, interestingly, The Rolling Stones and Elvis Presley. Presley's disco song 'Way Down', released in the summer of 1977, was in the charts at the time of his death. The lyrics of disco music were not particularly important in a political sense, it was feel good music to dance to. Laing suggested that punk voices seemed to want to "refuse the perfection of the amplified voice" and that by "excluding the musicality" of singing, the "possible contamination of the ...lyric message by the aesthetic pleasures offered by melody, harmony, pitch.... is avoided" (Laing 1985: 54). I agree that the sound of many punk songs, with a limited melody and harmony, tends to make the listener automatically focus on the lyrics, whereas with reggae, like disco music, the strong melody and rhythmic beat, can offer enjoyable distractions, so disco music seemed to act as an antithesis to punk at the time.

According to Reynolds, the bands signed to the Two-tone label fulfilled a demand by 1979, for “accessible, instant and above all danceable” music. He describes Two-tone as dance music played by live bands and that it “reclaimed dance music from disco” (Reynolds 2005: 281). In this respect the Two-tone sound differed from punk, which as mentioned earlier, wasn’t music to easily dance to. Disco music, like punk, had started to wane by the time Two-tone emerged in 1979 and so it was an ideal time to fill that gap and create music which combined the elements of being good to dance to, but with a young, energetic punky feel. Hebdige suggests that in Two-tone songs the politics were present, but, as in reggae music, were ‘sublimated’ to the rhythms (Hebdige 2000: 110).

During the mid-late 1970s reggae music would often be played between acts at punk venues – as was the experience of Two-tone band members in the West Midlands venues. In my interview with Dave Wakeling from The Beat he described some of the venues around Birmingham where there would be a good mix of punk and reggae music (Wakeling 2016). As Jones mentions, punk had helped to stimulate a large interest in reggae music amongst white youth. This exposure and availability en masse of reggae music by the late 1970s, provided conditions for “rock/reggae hybrids”. As Jones puts it, bands of the Two-tone movement were the first to come up with “a convincing and organic fusion of Jamaican music and rock.... representing one of the first indigenous pop forms in Britain to mediate a direct relation to the reggae tradition and black experience” (Jones 1988: 104).

Thompson suggests that by the end of 1977, roots reggae bands like Birmingham’s Steel Pulse, Misty in Roots, Matumbi, Aswad and others had evolved onto the punk scene – as “..instigators of a truly British consciousness”. He argues that the importance of this “cross-fertilisation” was that punk was not just a musical phenomenon but aired social and political concerns (Thompson 2004: 13).

2.3 Independent Labels

As the whole punk ethos of do-it-yourself developed musically, so did an increase in independent record labels and this was important for the Two-tone bands as the Two-tone label was started from scratch by Jerry Dammers of The Specials on a meagre budget. The independent labels did not spend money on promotional staff or expensive equipment and therefore their break-even figures could be as little as 10% of that of the major labels (Laing 1985: 17). Pete Hammond from the Birmingham punk group The Au Pairs said that a revolution came in punk music when small independent record outfits, like Rough Trade, set up an alternative way of selling records (Hammond 2012). Roddy Byers from The Specials remembers that because of the abundance of independent labels, it was possible to “get a 45 record (single) made yourself for £200” (Byers 2016).

Specialist record shops sprang up, providing an outlet for distribution and sale of the independent record labels. - Rough Trade was a particularly well-known store and as well as stocking the new punk records, also stocked reggae music. As Reynolds points out when enthusing about the advantages of Rough Trade’s one-off deals, it meant there could be a rapid response to popular taste, which was appropriate for the fast-changing trends of the post-punk era (Reynolds 2005: 105). Hebdige also makes the point that after the emergence of punk, major label record company executives were less clear on what constituted good music and decided to be more flexible with the artists themselves in the choice of music. (Hebdige 2000: 108). Dammers held out for autonomy when signing Two-tone with the more major label, Chrysalis – he wanted to retain control over the music that would be released on the Two-tone label as the whole ethos of Two-tone was important to him. The new flexibility allowed for this deal to be made, and it was, at the time a new departure (Williams 2009: 46).

2.4 West Midlands Scene and Role of Location

The fact that Two-tone music emerged from the West Midlands is an important aspect of the overall argument that the music was related to place of origin. A number of writers have argued that music and place are related and more particularly, they allude to the distinctive character of regional music scenes. For example Carney, when describing the geography of rock and roll in Britain, refers to The Beatles major impact in making it fashionable for bands/artists to come from outside London. He suggests that a “bland accent and London address” had become more of a “handicap” than an asset by the mid-1960s (Carney 1994: 231). By the end of the 1960s, three new areas of focus emerged in the British pop music scene – Liverpool with The Searchers, The Beatles, Gerry and The Pacemakers, Merseybeats; Manchester with The Hollies, Hermans Hermits & Dakotas and Birmingham with The Moody Blues, The Honeycombs and The Spencer Davis Group (Carney 1994: 231). Carney argues that the reasons why place-specific music develops involves a combination of factors and that certain social considerations particular to the places contribute to the music’s evolution. He mentions some of the factors which include past and present patterns of migration and settlement, ethnicity, socioeconomic conditions and the role played by community institutions like the church, schools and government. He uses the example of Dixieland jazz in New Orleans as exemplifying the close relationship between social conditions and music and how a special set of circumstances produced this musical form (Carney 1994: 265).

His views are endorsed by Cohen’s account of the Liverpool music scene in the mid-1980s, a time where Liverpool had well above the national rate of unemployment, particularly among the young, and there was a ‘mushrooming’ of bands in the city. She argues that many of Liverpool’s youth saw being in a band as

a legitimate career rather than a drop-out phase and an “alternative to walking around town all day” (Cohen 2001: 2-3). The Two-tone band members had a variety of jobs and in many cases it was to support themselves whilst getting more serious with their music. Tedious/dead-end employment is a topic that, as well as unemployment, also featured in some of the lyrics, for example, The Selecter’s *Three Minute Hero* refers to ‘stupid job’.

Migration is another area that Cohen explores when referring to Liverpool’s Welsh and Irish migrants and the collective music making at family parties. Furthermore she argues that Liverpool was “more susceptible to American cultural trends” brought over by sailors and American servicemen in the 1950s and 1960s which influenced skiffle bands performing in the city in the 1950s and later the work of The Beatles (Cohen 2001: 12-13).

There were parallels in the West Indian migrant population in the West Midlands and musical family parties, shebeens, providing one of the first types of venue where the reggae/ska music would be heard by various populations within the cities. The Virgin record store in Coventry also played an important role on the local music scene and John Bradbury, drummer in The Specials, had worked there. Pete Waterman, a local dj/music promoter who would later be part of the Stock, Aitken and Waterman trio of hit songwriters in the late 1980s, ran a record store on the floor above the Virgin record store called the Soul Hole, which became a hub for local musicians and music fans to listen to soul records. The Coventry branch of Virgin produced its own charts for a local magazine called Hobo. The store was small and run by two extremely enthusiastic characters, Mike O’Hare and Malc who encouraged people to spend time in the store listening to and discussing music (Coventry Disco Archive 2015). So the Virgin store and upstairs the Soul Hole were a hub of musical activity. Richard Eddington comments on The Hope & Anchor pub in Coventry as a venue where the dj would often play early reggae/ska music by

Desmond Dekker and Dave & Ansell Collins at discos it held. The dj would also sometimes include songs that were favourites on the Northern Soul circuit and enthuses that locals on the independent scene, as well as “misfits” and students would frequent the pub (Eddington 2004: 18).

When describing the make-up of local bands in Liverpool in the mid-1980s Cohen states that the musicians stemmed from diverse social and educational backgrounds, but that there were common characteristics, some of which were similar to the Two-tone bands. She states “on average, most seemed to last two or three years....and comprise members aged 20-30 years old” (Cohen 2001: 16). The Two-tone phenomenon lasted between two and three years and the majority of members, apart from the veteran Jamaican saxophone and trombone players of The Beat’s Saxa and The Specials’ Rico Rodriguez, were within that age bracket. However, in Cohen’s Liverpool the bands were “nearly all white”, whereas the Two-tone bands were racially mixed. Cohen suggests that the absence of black members could be explained by the fact that most of Liverpool’s black population was of African descent, unlike cities such as Birmingham and Manchester, which had a large West Indian population – and therefore West Indian music such as reggae would have been less prominent in Liverpool. Another explanation proposed by Cohen is that there was a particularly big problem with racism in Liverpool and that there was a “noticeable racial segregation” where very few black people were seen in the city centre – in the shops or clubs (Cohen 2001: 17). This was not the case in the West Midlands – even ten years before the era that Cohen wrote about, the mid-1980s, there was a vibrant black and white scene in both Birmingham and Coventry where racially mixed bands played some of the same venues in the city centres.

The West Midlands, and Birmingham in particular, are areas rife with contradictions when it comes to the matter of race. As Birmingham suffered decline in

manufacturing and patterns of population replacement it produced especially intense encounters between black and white working-class communities. There had been a series of confrontations about housing, employment and settlement patterns (Jones 1988: 126). However, it has been argued that there was also an “unprecedented rapport between certain sections of the black and white communities, and a more dynamic encounter between their respective cultural and political traditions” (Jones 1988: 126). Jones explains that this rapport was founded on decades of close living and interaction in certain areas of the city, becoming most visible amongst the young. Furthermore I had already established that the West Midlands, during the 1970s, had a higher than average youth population which would be conducive to a more vibrant music scene and more bands being formed.

As a large relatively young Jamaican population settled in the UK’s larger cities the early 1960s saw an emergence of a culturally more self-sufficient and cohesive Afro-Caribbean community in Britain which according to Jones, led to a growing of cultural, economic and leisure institutions catering specifically for the needs of the migrant community. For example a range of restaurants, cafes, churches, nightclubs and record shops catered for the cultural and recreational needs of the emergent black community (Jones 1988: 10). Black clubs, Saturday night blues parties, local sound systems, small independent record labels and the success of imported Jamaican records took on an increasingly distinctive shape during the 1970s. According to Mykaell Riley from Steel Pulse, in his chapter on Bass Culture sound system culture prevailed in the 1970s in Britain, despite the domination of disco – it was self contained, with its own pressing plants, distribution networks and touring circuit (Riley 2014: 105).

Clubs that were home to British reggae bands like Misty, Aswad and Steel Pulse were located in Soho, East London and Handsworth in Birmingham. As Chambers notes, when summarising his observations on British reggae, there is a trajectory

from mid-1970s reggae and the Marley era to the “post-punk landscape of the late 1970s...The white dub of Public Image Ltd, the Birmingham toasting of The Beat and UB40, the 2-Tone ska revival of The Specials and The Selecter” (Chambers 1985: 174). Reggae music was popular with black youth and would often be played on portable sound systems in urban inner city areas like Handsworth, where white youth living in the area would also be exposed to the sound, leading to a new found musical multiculturalism. Until the mid-1970s, when artists like Bob Marley helped to promote reggae music to the mainstream, reggae and ska music hadn’t received much radio play. The Selecter song ‘On My Radio’ criticises the bland, lack of variety of music played on the radio. This would suggest that on the whole, the youth who were exposed to reggae and ska music were living in the big cities with a large West Indian population. Brian Travers from the band UB40 commented that it was all reggae music where he lived, in Balsall Heath (Birmingham), even in the youth clubs (Travers 2012). Hebdige noted that the rock and reggae communities of Coventry and Birmingham had never been segregated and that there was a casual basis for exchange between the two (Hebdige 2000: 111-112).

Migration patterns certainly informed the musical tastes of those living in racially mixed areas. According to Hebdige within a few years of the West Indian immigration into the UK during the 1950s – mid 1960s, “every major city with a sizeable West Indian population was beginning to shake to the sounds of ska and reggae” (Hebdige 2000: 90). Jamaican music was distributed via shops specialising in black music, such as the Rising Star record shop in Handsworth and the music gained a large fan base amongst, not only West Indian youth but white youth living in the neighbourhood. The political content in the Jamaican recorded music was an important means of communication for the black community, providing news of back home in the Caribbean to its expatriates in the British cities (Jones 1988: 35). Blues parties were a common occurrence in neighbourhoods like Balsall Heath and Handsworth in Birmingham. In the film *Made in Birmingham: Reggae: Punk:*

Bangra, Amlak Tafari from Steel Pulse explained that music was a release, that the blues parties would bring communities together, often hosted by Rastafarians, due to discrimination elsewhere (Tafari 2012). At the time Handsworth became home to such a large number of the Afro-Caribbean Brummie community to the point that the local dub poet, Benjamin Zephaniah, described it as “practically the Jamaican capital of Europe” (Turner 2014). On the BBC website showing photographs taken by Vanley Burke, a Jamaican who moved to Birmingham in the 1960s, it mentions that on African Liberation Day in 1977, Handsworth Park had the biggest black crowd gathering in Britain (BBC 2014). It is not surprising, therefore, that the West Midlands was home to Two-tone.

Young people are naturally drawn to big cities for various reasons, not least that they tend to be centres for entertainment and leisure pursuits, a point elaborated by Connell and Gibson, who argue how “large cities usually provide both the economic context (clubs, recording studios, managers) and perhaps, the inspiration through links with audiences, other musicians and composers” (Connell and Gibson 2003: 92). Birmingham and Coventry, both being cities and in Birmingham’s case very large, had all these factors – there were several nightclubs during the 1970s in both cities, where live acts would perform and clubs like The Locarno in Coventry, Barbarella’s and Bogarts in Birmingham played host to many bands. According to Birmingham’s music archive, Barbarella’s, a nightclub in Birmingham city centre, which was one of several venues owned by the Fewtrell family, saw punk bands including The Clash, The Sex Pistols, Siouxsie and The Banshees, The Ramones and Blondie perform, together with local punk bands like The Killjoys, Suburban Punks and others, who would support them. Before being a central venue for punk music, Barbarella’s had hosted large rock bands including Queen and ACDC, but the club gained legendary status as a venue for punk music during the mid-late 1970s. This was also a venue where there was a punk and reggae cohesion, as in-between performances the punk bands would often give their reggae records to the

disc jockey to play. (Birmingham Music Archive nd). Pete Clemons comments on the vibrant independent music scene in Coventry in the late 1970s and thinks it was ignited when both The Clash and The Sex Pistols played a gig together in the city in late 1976 (Clemons 2015: 18).

Many of the artists coming out of New York's punk and new wave scene from CBGBs club, like Patti Smith and Blondie, were able to live in Manhattan more or less rent free when the city was on the verge of bankruptcy during the 1970s, often living in large warehouse-type buildings that had gone into decline. CBGBs is the club in New York which is often attributed with being an influence on the origins of punk music (Connell and Gibson 2003: 77). In the BBC Radio 6 programme *Too Much Fighting on the Dancefloor* Wayne Hemingway described the housing situation of inner cities in the UK during the late 1970s, early 1980s, as being "cheap spaces to have a go...". As mentioned in the previous chapter, many people were moving out of inner city areas and Hemingway goes on to describe a "leaking city centre population so (the youth) were coming in, plugging gaps like urban pioneers" (BBC Radio 6 2015).

Colleges are usually located in inner cities and art college students, especially, seemed to be attracted into the music scene (Connell and Gibson 2003: 92). Brackett suggested that art schools played a central role in transformations of British pop from around the mid-1960s, listing John Lennon, Keith Richards, Pete Townshend and Ray Davies as examples of alumni. He suggests that art school helped to foster an image of an artist as a rebel slightly on the margin of society "resisting mediocrity of the practical" and therefore allowing some pop stars to use image and seem to maintain individuality by "being able to be marketed despite claims of anti-commercialism" (Brackett 2000: 161). Also, Frith & Horne argue that it was often the managers behind some of the punk bands, like Bernie Rhodes, Malcolm McLaren and Tony Wilson, who drove the articulation side of the genre,

Andy Warhol's Factory in New York, shown at the pop-art exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery, being an inspiration (Frith & Horne 1987: 130). George Marshall quotes Bernie Rhodes's stance on the importance of image at the time "whether people like it or not songs are quickly swallowed up by the music business and churned back out as products to sell to an ever-fickle Joe Public" (Marshall 1993: 13). Quite a few of the successful punk band members had been to art college, including Viv Albertine of The Slits and punk had a very defined image, which was intended to come across as anti-commercial. Art school informed the experience of some members of The Specials such as Jerry Dammers and Horace Panter who studied art at Lanchester Polytechnic where the two first met. Also, John Bradbury of The Specials graduated from Hull Polytechnic with a degree in Fine Art (Williams 2009: 31). Frith & Horne go on to refer to some post-punk musicians "concern to supervise their own packaging" and translate it into a corporate image (Frith & Horne 1987: 146). Dammers put his art training to good use when he designed the logo for the Two-tone label and was the driving force in the band's overall image, often making decisions on what the members would wear. Likewise, Dammers took a lead in the videos that accompanied some of The Specials' songs (Byers 2016).

In his ethnographical research, Jones refers to two broad social settings that began to emerge in Birmingham: the inner city and outer-ring suburbs. He describes the close living spaces shared by a multiplicity of social groups, eg. Sparkhill and Balsall Heath in the inner ring. That Balsall Heath in particular, had an unsegregated character: that since the 1950s migrant workers of Afro-Caribbean, Asian and Irish origin had settled and coexisted there. He notes that the specifically musical spaces and institutions of the Afro-Caribbean community, like the dances, blues parties and record shops have had a long tradition of white inhabitation dating back to the 1950s (Jones 1988: 127). During his research in the mid-1980s, Jones observed that the more integrated youth clubs were mainly found in South-Central

Birmingham, such as Highgate, Balsall Heath and Sparkbrook. Clientele typically comprised Asian, Afro-Caribbean, mixed race and white youth, reflecting the “fluid intermixing” to be found in the neighbourhood generally (Jones 1988: 133-134). He noted that a number of mixed youth clubs also existed temporarily in the suburbs of South Birmingham in the mid to late 1970s in places like Bartley Green, Northfield and Kings Norton, and were well known in their time for their relatively unsegregated character. This ties in with the findings of the report in to Birmingham’s racial dispersal policy during the late 1960s/early 1970s where a number of black families were housed in middle ring and outer ring areas of the city. Youth clubs may have started off playing heavy rock and pop disco, but as the inner city areas didn’t have many official leisure facilities, the black youth who lived there went to the outer ring to look for venues to enjoy music/leisure and as a result reggae and soul music started to take over. From the youth club scene, as people got older, they started to go to nightclubs in the city centre and according to Jones, nearly all Birmingham’s discos, at some point in time, held regular reggae and soul evenings (Jones 1988: 134). This meant that there was a mix of black and white people going to these venues, which were catering for varied music tastes. In the suburbs of South Birmingham, sound systems could be found playing regularly at church halls, pubs, blues parties and private parties. Catering mainly for the small black population in the outer-ring areas, these events also attracted a considerable number of local whites. By the late 1970s, young whites who had grown to like reggae partly by their involvement in the local youth club scene, began to visit the various dances and parties run by these sound systems (Jones 1988: 138-140).

Jones points out that “the proximity of black and white communities, and the networks of shared social and leisure space characteristic of some Birmingham inner-city areas, have been highly conducive to the formation of mixed reggae and rock bands” (Jones 1988: 140). As mentioned, in Balsall Heath and Moseley black and white musicians of all ages and backgrounds had long been jamming together

on a regular basis. Jones also points out that something of a similarly integrated music scene also existed in Coventry and that the groups that went on to form the core of the Two-tone movement, emerged from precisely these surroundings (Jones 1988: 140). Neol Davies, the only white member of The Selecter, comments in Richard Eddington's book on how he liked going to his local youth club where reggae music was mainly what was played (Eddington 2004: 26). In an interview I had with Roddy Byers he commented "there was a multi-racial music scene in Birmingham and Coventry in general ... it didn't seem odd" and "they (others in the music business outside the West Midlands) said how it was amazing that you guys are black and white" (Byers 2015). In an interview for *Quietus*, Dave Wakeling described Birmingham as "an odd place.. the industrialisation moved race relations on a bit – people of different races forced to work together, then forced to stand together in the dole queue" (Wakeling cited in Stubbs 2012: 2). Wakeling goes on to further his point in an interview in the *Daily Express* in 2014 when commenting on the reaction the band often received outside the West Midlands. "I was used to having black mates, it was no big deal. I think it had something to do with the car industry in the area. When you've stood next to a bloke on the assembly line for ten years.... you don't even notice what colour his skin is" (Wakeling cited in Scott 2014: 62).

Both the timing of the music scene in terms of punk and reggae in the UK at this time and the conditions for absorption and exchange of music in Birmingham and Coventry, meant that the fusion of reggae and punk, to produce a new hybrid form of ska, was about to happen.

CHAPTER 3 TWO-TONE MUSIC: MAIN CHARACTERISTICS

In this chapter I apply theories to analyse lyrics of some of the Two-tone songs and performances in order to identify and contextualise them in relation to what was happening in music both locally and nationally. I show how many of the topics of the songs relate to political issues identified in earlier chapters, explaining how racism was manifest at concerts and how specific artists responded. I also explore the nuances of performance that the Two-tone bands used not only through lyrics, but other ways of communicating their message to the audience. This textual analysis is supported by primary source materials including contemporary interviews and reviews by music journalists in addition to more recent interviews I carried out as part of my primary research.

3.1 Formation of The Specials, The Selecter and The Beat

The three bands around which my research is based hailed from the West Midlands – The Specials and The Selecter from Coventry and The Beat from Birmingham. Other bands that were signed to the label during Two-tone's heyday, were Madness, a band from London, who signed to Two-tone for their first record and went on part of the Two-tone tour in late 1979, The Bodysnatchers and Swinging Cats. Dexys Midnight Runners, also a Birmingham band, joined the Two-tone tour when Madness left, but never released a song on the label and were more of a soul band. All three of the bands I am focusing on included members who were born in the Caribbean and migrated to England during the 1960s as children, illustrating the close link cemented between the West Midlands and the West Indies which went on to influence the look and sound of Two-tone.

The Specials formed in Coventry and comprised of seven members – five white and two black. Both black members, Lynval Golding and Neville Staple, were born in Jamaica and migrated to England during the 1960s as children. Jerry Dammers, who brought The Specials together, had been in various bands during the early 1970s in the Coventry area, including a soul band. His taste in music had been eclectic and included a liking for bands such as mod bands The Who, The Small Faces as well as glam rock band Slade (Williams 2009:16). Dammers had worked with Neol Davies, later to form The Selecter, sporadically during this period.

Thompson suggests that it was Davies's early career on the Midlands music scene that interconnects many of the Coventry musicians who would subsequently be part of Two-tone (Thompson 2004: 9). Horace Panter was once in a soul band in Coventry and knew Dammers, when both studying art at Lanchester Polytechnic. When punk music emerged in 1976, Dammers embraced the punk ethos of anyone being able to be in a band and met Terry Hall and Roddy Byers, members of punk bands playing around the West Midlands circuit. Dave Wakeling from The Beat also liked the agit-prop element of punk having reportedly said "I could do that .. of the people, for the people, by the people" (Thompson 2004: 104). Dammers, like many other fans/performers of punk music at that time, also liked reggae music and had been introduced to ska music through his brother's record collection (Thompson 2004:42).

According to Marshall, Dammers had wanted to experiment with ska music for a while, by the time The Specials were formed, suggests one of the reasons for the inclusion, was Bernie Rhodes's comments that so far The Specials' sound had been confused (Marshall 1993: 13). In a BBC2 Arena documentary of The Specials, Jerry Dammers is shown holding up the album *The History of Ska* as being an inspiration for their music (BBC2 1980). However, some other members of the bands were not so keen to go back to ska. Silverton Hutchinson, the original drummer, felt that it was old fashioned (Byers 2015). Byers told me that the

decision to eventually settle on a form of ska music was taken and the band spent about a year rehearsing “the ska way of doing things” to their songs, after their tour with The Clash (Byers 2015).

Silverton Hutchinson had not only become despondent with the musical choice, but had missed a lot of rehearsals due to other commitments, so he was replaced by John Bradbury. Like Panter and Dammers, Bradbury had studied art and shared a flat with Dammers at the time (Marshall 1993: 12). Working at Coventry’s Virgin record store had given Bradbury exposure to a lot of reggae and ska music. Neville Staple was enlisted to the band as he proved very proficient at toasting where he provided vocals and high energy dancing. Coventry’s compact size was advantageous in that Lynval Golding had also been in a local soul band and got to know Dammers through living a few doors away. Rico Rodriguez, who, like Saxa from The Beat, was one of the original Jamaican saxophone players from the first era of ska bands during the 1960s, became an honorary member of The Specials, providing an added authenticity to their sound (Thompson 2004: 91).

The Beat, formed in Birmingham, comprised of six members – three black and three white. This included Saxa, born in Jamaica in the 1930s, a veteran of the first wave of ska musicians who provided the distinctive horn on The Beat’s records. One of the other black members, the drummer Everett Morton, was born in the West Indies and migrated to England as a child during the mid-1960s. Ranking Roger, whose parents migrated from the Caribbean, was born in Birmingham and grew up in Handsworth (Marshall 1993: 37). Two of the white members of the band, Dave Wakeling and Andy Cox, were born and grew up in Balsall Heath and Handsworth respectively, both suburbs of Birmingham with large black populations. David Steele moved to Birmingham to do a college course after having met Wakeling and Cox in the Isle of Wight (Marshall 1993: 37). Dave Wakeling saw some of the West Midland rock/metal bands whilst growing up, including Black Sabbath and Led

Zeppelin, but it was when going to punk gigs around Birmingham that influenced his decision to be in a band (Thompson 2004: 104). Everett Morton played drums in the evenings and weekends in soul and reggae bands whilst working in a kettle-spinning factory during the day. He was spotted by other members around Birmingham, recruited and so The Beat was formed. The band secured a residency at a pub in Digbeth, central Birmingham where they started to gain a following (Marshall 1993: 37). Ranking Roger was once in a local punk band in Birmingham and as mentioned previously, had become well known in the city for his toasting over records particularly at Barbarellas nightclub. Roger had also worked with local reggae bands, including UB40 (Marshall 1993: 37). Dave Wakeling explained how The Beat, independently from The Coventry bands down the road, though simultaneously, had stumbled on a ska sound in that at the many parties in the Moseley, Bristol Road parts of Birmingham, typically there would be two disc jockeys - playing reggae and punk songs alternately. It made sense to mix the two together which would “keep the people on their feet, rather than burnt out with continuous punk or too relaxed with continuous reggae” (Wakeling 2016).

Reynolds describes The Beat as being “poster boys for integration...blending male beauty (Roger and Wakeling) and sound socialist politics” (Reynolds 2005: 290). Balsall Health and Handsworth seemed to form the nucleus of the band and city centre nightclubs like Barbarellas, served as a platform for getting noticed and connecting with like-minded musicians. UB40 were also forming round about the same time in the Balsall Health and Handsworth areas of the city.

Birmingham also played a significant part in the initial success of The Specials: Dammers knew one of the well-known and influential disc jockeys on the Birmingham music scene, who had a connection with Midland Concert Productions, and The Specials secured a residency at The Golden Eagle, which increased their fan base (Panter 2008:30). During this time the band got to play with Steel Pulse,

the roots reggae band, whose album *Handsworth Revolution* was described by Horace Panter as “about as militant as it was legally acceptable to be” (Panter 2008: 31). In one of Steel Pulse’s songs, Jah Pickney/RAR the chorus includes the lines “we’re gonna hunt the National Front” (Thompson 2004: 102).

The Selecter comprised seven members, four black, one white and two mixed-race. Four members of The Selecter had migrated to England from the Caribbean as children – Charlie Anderson, Desmond Brown and Charles Bainbridge from Jamaica and Arthur Hendrickson from St Kitts. Pauline Black, the lead singer, was born and brought up in Essex and moved to Coventry to study radiography at Lanchester Polytechnic. Compton Anamor moved to England from Ghana in West Africa as a child. All the members of The Selecter, apart from Black, who had been spotted by Davies as a solo folk singer, had played in various bands on the Coventry music scene and had often played in various configurations with members of The Specials (Marshall 1993: 33-34). Neol Davies, rhythm guitarist, wanted to form a similar band to The Specials and as there was a lot of reggae, punk and soul bands around Coventry at that time, had plenty of talent to choose from. A reggae band called Hard Top 22 provided the core of musicians and with the addition of Pauline Black as lead singer, The Selecter was formed with Arthur Hendrickson as fellow vocalist, Charlie Anderson bass guitarist, Desmond Brown on keyboards, Charles Bembridge as drummer and Compton Anamor on guitar (2-Tone nd). This shows that although a small city, Coventry had a vibrant, yet very tight-knit music scene with a combination of soul, reggae and punk music being played at many venues. A crossover of musical styles seemed to be taking place and it seems that these central venues were conducive to the flourishing of the Two-tone bands.

The big break for The Specials came when, through Roddy Byers’ knowing Steve Connell, a friend originally from Coventry who was now working for The Clash, an extremely successful punk band by then, they were invited to be support for The

Clash's 'On Parole' tour in 1978. As The Automatics the band had also been given the opportunity to support The Clash at Birmingham's Barbarella's nightclub earlier that year (Thompson 2004: 16). The Specials impressed the band and remained as support for longer than originally planned. Going on tour with The Clash had provided the group with more experience and insight into the national music scene. There was another support band called Suicide, who often suffered racist abuse from the crowds as did The Specials sometimes. It was the first time that the band had experienced this sort of behaviour from the National Front. This was one of the factors underpinning Dammers' vision to integrate the music of black and white communities in order to try to combat racism (Thompson 2004: 44). As Horace Panter puts it "it was a pivotal moment that formed The Specials and our proactive anti-racist stance" (Panter 2008: 43). The problem of racist abuse would also occur, to varying degrees, at Two-tone concerts, where sometimes performances would have to be interrupted when fights broke out.

3.2 Launch of Two-tone

Jerry Dammers' dream was of Two-tone as a "modern Motown – a hit factory with a diverse roster united by a common but aesthetically flexible sound" (Reynolds 2005: 289). After returning from a trip to Paris to perform a gig, arranged by Bernie Rhodes, Dammers was inspired to write a song called 'Gangsters' (Byers 2015). As attempts to attract major record labels had not been successful, The Specials decided to bring out the record on their own label, which seemed feasible as mentioned previously, it was an era where many groups were forming their own labels. Two-tone records was named after the two-tone tonic suits worn by mods and skinheads in the late 1960s, when the first wave of ska music was enjoyed in Britain and the name also captured the multi-racial nature of the bands (Marshall 1993: 14).

Cashmore explains that during the mid-1960s the peak of the early mod years when things were prosperous, there was on the whole good relations between black and white youth and both had a shared liking for black American and West Indian music (Cashmore 1984: 32). As the mods had enjoyed the first-wave of ska music, as they re-emerged in the late 1970s, in a mod revival movement, this helped to make the Two-tone ska-influenced sound and style popular. Eddington suggests that Rico Rodriguez's signing with Island Records to record his 1977 album *Man From Wareika*, also helped to promote a renewed interest in ska music and Rodriguez's association with Two-tone (Eddington 2004: 100). The release of The Specials' first single coincided with the release of the film *Quadrophenia*, The Who's film about the Mod movement of the 1960s.

Ska music was introduced to Britain by the Windrush generation of West Indian migrants in the late 1950s/early 1960s who brought some of the ska music from Jamaica with them. Many of the young West Indian men who followed this music, had a sharp sense of style. This rude boy style, direct from the streets of Kingston (Jamaica), struck a chord with black British youth, as a way for them to express their heritage (BBC4 2014). The style was highlighted in a performance by Desmond Dekker on Top of the Pops in 1967 who had a big hit with 'The Israelites'; he wore tailored trousers, short enough to allow easy manoeuvre and show impressive footwork when dancing. This neat, sharp, rude boy look of tonic mohair suits, loafers/brogues shoes, as well as appealing to the mods of the early-mid 1960s, was also adopted and adapted later in the decade by the harder-edged skinheads who were also fans of ska music and American soul (Osgerby 1998: 66).

Like mods, the skinheads placed importance on their clothes and were willing to pay, often more than a week's wages, for the right pair of shoes (BBC4 2014).

Ska music did not get much radio play but was popular in big city youth clubs, in neighbourhoods where there was a large Jamaican population. There was some fluidity with the migration from Jamaica in that members of the family would be sent for, so the spreading of culture between the two countries was taking place (Augustyn 2013: 60). As the liking for ska music amongst the skinhead tribe grew, the ska musicians cottoned on to the demand in this new market and a single called 'Skinhead Moonstomp' was recorded in 1969 by Symarip. This song became hugely popular in various clubs – a homegrown reggae hit for skinheads (BBC4 2014). The song included lyrics about the skinhead fashions “put your braces together and your boots on your feet”. This song, a decade later, was revived by Two-tone to become part of The Specials' repertoire.

Having been under Bernie Rhodes's wing, Dammers knew that the band needed an image to bridge the gap about what they were trying to achieve and audience appreciation. Any band, according to Marshall, had to look to the style and image of the West Indian rude boy and British skinhead for inspiration (Marshall 1993: 14). Neol Davies, cited in Richard Eddington's book, gives another reason for the adoption of this style, that charity shops were selling tonic suits cheap and that ska records were filling the junk shops. The look wasn't far removed from the new wave style and jackets and small ties (Eddington 2004: 75).

Don Letts enthused that the “music and clothes helped to create an identity where I lived ... and it was all about the skinhead” (Letts BBC4 2014). So, for short while in the late 1960s, two cultures were brought together through music and fashion. Throughout the 1970s, however, many of the skinheads would be corrupted by far-right politics (BBC4 2014).

The next step was for The Specials to record the song and for this purpose The Horizon record studios in Coventry was used. This use of local facilities was

obviously convenient to the band and as they were on a budget, negated the need for transport. The infrastructure for making/producing music in Coventry was in place. The money to record the song which had been borrowed, did not stretch to another song, however, for the B side so Neol Davies, a longstanding friend of Dammers, had composed an instrumental track which had included John Bradbury on drums. The track was named 'The Selecter' by The Selecter, a group which had not at that point properly formed, and became the B side to 'Gangsters' (Williams 2009: 34). The tune appealed to The Specials and a ska rhythm was added – this provided the soon to be Selecter with their big break (Panter 2008: 67). Pauline Black described hearing the track for the first time as having a “haunting trombone melody.. and a metronomic tchk, tchk, tchk of the rhythm guitar”. Neol Davies had played it to Black and the other musicians who he had assembled that evening to bring together cohesively as The Selecter (Black 2011: 124). The two bands were closely associated, with members having played together in various combinations on the local circuit, with shared musical influences and aspirations.

On one side of the single it says 'The Special AKA : 'Gangsters' and on the other, 'VS The Selecter'. According to Panter, the idea had come from an advert for a sound system battle, which as previously mentioned, was a big part of the early ska scene in Jamaica and had now migrated to English cities. Members of the band got involved in putting the 1500 singles into cardboard sleeves and stamping them – they were then distributed via Rough Trade (Panter 2008: 71). The single became an instant hit, making the top ten and eventually selling over 250,000 copies. Simon Frith described it as “an eccentric reworking” of an old Prince Buster song “remarkable, solidly, skilfully captivating” (Frith 1980). It received a lot of airplay on John Peel's radio 1 show and various major record company A&R men turned up for this new band's performances, hoping to sign them to their labels.

Dammers was adamant he wanted autonomy with the Two-tone label and this did not appeal to most of the record companies. Chrysalis, however, was agreeable to Dammers' demands to have a separate Two-tone identity from the major label and a deal was made (Williams 2009: 36). Dammers was willing to sign for less money than other companies were offering, in order to have more freedom and control over the label (Byers 2016). There was a clause in the contract that allowed Two-tone to release up to ten singles a year, with bands of their choice, and for each to be given a budget. The Selecter were made joint directors of the label with The Specials when they signed to Chrysalis/Two-tone on the release of their first single 'On My Radio' (Black 2011: 163). The NME described the deal as "almost unique" in its negotiation with a major label as having the right to sign the groups they wanted. Charlie Anderson from The Selecter described the situation as "one big militant A&R department, all 14 of us" (NME 1979: 24).

Another band who seemed to be on a similar wavelength to The Specials, 100 miles down the road in London, was Madness, who had also been experimenting with ska music. Suggs, the lead singer, remembers that after the film *Quadrophenia* came out, he and his friends got immersed in 1960s music, and like Neol Davies's Coventry, there were plenty of second-hand clothes shops in London which had lots of "great gear from those days" (McPherson 2013: 45). Madness's sound seemed to be from a broad range of eras and genres from the past, as he also refers to the film *American Graffiti*, shown in the mid-1970s with its references to 1950s rock and roll soundtrack being enjoyed by members of the band. The cover versions that early Madness played at gigs ranged from 1950s R&B, rock'n'roll, Motown, ska and reggae (McPherson 2013: 120), which seems to have some similarities with The Specials, The Selecter and The Beat. Suggs describes Madness's first encounter with The Specials at The Hope & Anchor pub in London as "brilliant, playing ska and from Coventry. I didn't know whether to feel jealous, or vindicated, that we'd been on to something after all" (McPherson 2013: 132). This is interesting because

Madness seemed to be the only band at the time in London who were going in a similar route to the three West Midland bands. Jerry Dammers and Suggs spent the rest of the evening talking about music and Dammers invited Madness to sign to the Two-tone label. Madness's 'The Prince', a tribute to the 1960s ska veteran Prince Buster, was the second single to be released on Two-tone records.

The Specials, Selecter and The Beat all produced re-workings of old ska songs, mainly from the 1960s, some released as singles while others were just included on albums. These re-workings complemented their new hybrid sound of ska and also showed respect for the original songs and artists. The Specials – 'A Message to You Rudie' originally by Jamaican ska artist Dandy Livingstone, had been a message to the 'rude' boys in 1960s Jamaica to "stop your messing around, better think of your future" which was chosen as the group felt that the lyrics were pertinent to 1970s youth in the UK (Williams 2009: 50). Another old ska classic to appear on The Specials' first album, *The Specials*, was 'Too Hot', a Prince Buster song about a tense atmosphere of expectant violence. A similar atmosphere of expectant violence had become part of the scene in towns and cities in the UK during the late 1970s and this topic was to feature regularly in Two-tone lyrics and affect some of the concerts. Suggs from Madness remembers that during the 1970s there were all sorts of crossovers and musical mergers, and that sometimes, just leaving your friends and going home alone could be dangerous (McPherson 2013: 128).

On The Selecter's first album *Too Much Pressure* a cover of 'Carry to Bring Home' was included, which had originally been recorded by Justin Hinds. This is a song about oppression, containing some similar lyrics to those of the Bob Marley reggae songs. The James Bond instrumental theme, given the name 'James Bond' on the album, was chosen because of the connection with James Bond to Jamaica – the first film *Dr No*, where the theme comes from, was set in Jamaica and Ian Fleming, the author lived in Jamaica. 007 (Shanty Town) was also the name of a ska record

by Desmond Dekker in 1967. The Selecter often showed the importance of Jamaica as an influence in their music – the original title for the instrumental of ‘The Selecter’, was originally called ‘The Kingston Affair’ and the word Selecter is the Jamaican word for disc jockey (Hebdige 2000: 63). The Specials and The Selecter also chose songs by The Pioneers to cover, with The Selecter it was ‘Time Hard’, renamed as ‘Everyday’ and with The Specials it was ‘Long Shot Kick de Bucket’.

The Beat covered a Prince Buster song ‘Whine and Grind’ and their first single, a cover of Smokey Robinson and The Miracles’ catchy 1970 Motown hit ‘Tears of a Clown’, was also included on their first album, *I Just Can’t Stop It*. This song had been a popular choice whilst the group were playing in the various clubs and pubs around Birmingham – Dave Wakeling explained how it “always brought the house down” (Stubbs 2012). The band had given the song a fast reggae/ska sound and Ranking Roger used a heavy Jamaican accent for parts of the song.

3.3 Two-tone in the Context of Performance/Theory

John Street proposes that when pop stars concern themselves with pop’s political role, artists who “pronounce on the serious business of politics” can be generally split into two groups; those who happen to be musicians, having acquired fame which they use to support causes and those who use their music to give expression to their political views (Street 2006: 45). The Two-tone bands I would suggest are in the latter category, though, as Street suggests, many artists can perform both roles – and the two may be linked. Street describes The Specials ‘Ghost Town’ as a “social comment song” rather than “protest” whereas he cites Pink Floyd’s ‘Another Brick in the Wall’ as a protest song (Street 2006: 47). He also argues that the political content of popular music either reflects or responds to reality, suggesting that studies of pop can “mark the passage of time through the rise and decline of

the medium's political awareness" (Street 2006: 48). The lyrics of many Two-tone songs place them in the late 1970s/early 1980s period, making references to specific issues at the time. Street also makes a general link with political changes in the world more generally, for example the impact of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s which corresponds with the "trajectory of popular music" during that period (Street 2006: 48). Amongst other examples, Street refers to punk's engagement with anti-racism in the late 1970s as being directly related to the rise of racism and racist organisations like the National Front in that period. He does mention that this is a complex area however and that there is not always a direct correlation.

Frith draws attention to a survey carried out in Michigan schools in the 1960s which concluded that most teenage listeners are not aware of what the lyrics of protest songs are about. He also draws on some research carried out by Norman Denzin which argued that pop audiences only listened to the sound – melody and beat – and so the effectiveness of any message was limited (Frith 2007:27). It is suggested that it was more the changing of technology and "modes of lyrical production" that were the reason for an increase in political lyrics, rather than audience demands. The 1950s Tin Pan Alley production system mode of music making, for example, had given way to more competition, which created a drive for more political lyrics (Frith 2007: 227-228). Frith also makes the point that the "diversity in popular music lyrics correlates directly with the number of independent units producing songs" and that a "tightening of corporate control leads to a narrowing range of songs" (Frith 2007: 96). This is interesting as the mid – late 1970s was an era when a lot of independent record companies sprang up or, indeed, large corporate record companies started to want to take smaller companies under their umbrella and allow, usually through good business sense, a certain amount of freedom and retention of their name/image for various reasons. Referring to the surveys, I would argue that by the time Two-tone music came onto the scene,

people had become more aware of political topics in songs – it had become, to a certain extent, fashionable at the time, particularly after punk rock. However, the Two-tone musicians were clearly aware that melody and beat were important and made songs that were good to dance to. Also, according to Street during the 1970s, the music papers, particularly the NME, became more politicised and did not just report on the music, but also on political events and this therefore sometimes had an effect of representing musicians and their music as political, so this added to the demand for political lyrics (Street 2006: 94). It was also a good vehicle for highlighting the increasing political topics used in lyrics.

Two-Tone had its own label, which was allowed to maintain control over material, even when signed to the more major label, Chrysalis. So the combination of, and increase in, political 'issues' (rising unemployment, racism etc.) that was taking place during the 1970s, and in the West Midlands in particular, and the freedom that the Two-Tone bands had with their lyrics, meant that the time/conditions was ideal for them to reflect politically about what was going on. As Dave Wakeling put it "punk had co-opted the major labels back, smoke was still in the air so they could get away with lots of things and use the media space for something valuable, dropping hints about CND and so forth" (Wakeling 2016).

Frith alludes to a study of the sociolinguistics of British pop song pronunciation which illustrates how accents can provide linguistic variations to lyrics (Frith 1996: 166). The American accent is often used in songs by British singers: Elton John for example or early British rock'n'roll singers like Cliff Richard and Marty Wilde who tried to emulate Elvis Presley. In a similar manner, Mick Jagger drew a lot of inspiration from the American Blues artists and their Southern drawl. Frith also notes Trudgill's observations that from the mid-1960s, as British pop music became more established, less singers were eager to sound American, focussing instead on crossing class barriers by using regional British accents. The Beatles for instance,

whose career spanned most of the decade, used an American accent in their early songs like 'Help', 'I Wanna Hold Your Hand', etc. but into the later half of the 1960s, were using an English accent for songs like 'I Am The Walrus' and 'A Day In The Life'. Frith uses the example of punk music in particular in crossing class barriers and the use of "low-status pronunciations.... non-standard grammatical forms" (Frith 1996: 167-168). This technique, according to Machin, was used to signify authenticity and disrespect for mainstream values (Machin 2010: 121). By 1979 Pink Floyd's 'Another Brick in the Wall' single included a group of London schoolchildren chant "we don't need no education...." in a broad London accent. David Bowie sometimes pronounced lyrics in a strong London accent, for example in 'Starman', released in 1972 where comparisons were drawn with Anthony Newley.

Punk artists clearly shunned the use of an American accent in favour of a British accent and as most of the punk bands were from London, a London accent tends to be associated with the majority of 1970s punk songs. The Buzzcocks, a Manchester punk band, appropriated a London accent even though the singer, Pete Shelley's speaking accent is broad Lancashire. Post-punk band, The Jam, also used a heavy London accent, not as surprising as they were from the South East, which is particularly evident in 'Going Underground', illustrating the enduring nature of the shift towards the use of British accents during the second half of the 1970s. Two-tone bands continued to use English accents and it could be argued that, like punk before them, the Two-tone bands use of London/Midland dialects was designed to emphasise that this was music of the streets (Cashmore 1984: 55).

Drawing on theory of pronunciation of lyrics and accents in particular, Frith notes that one of the genres to use emphasis on accents were reggae singers, using a "Jamaican lilt" (Frith 1996: 167). Jamaican patois was used as a technique by all three Two-tone bands, notably by Pauline Black, who has a middle-class Southern English speaking voice, but chose to adopt a heavy Jamaican accent in parts of

songs such as 'Three Minute Hero'. Ranking Roger, who has a Brummie accent, used Jamaican patois most of the time and this is particularly noticeable in 'Tears of a Clown' and 'Ranking Full Stop'. This technique helped to provide an authenticity for the ska sound and an acknowledgement by the bands to the earlier roots of ska music and Jamaica. Of the main vocalists, only Neville Staple had been born in Jamaica and so had a natural Jamaican accent.

During a performance by The Selecter of 'Three Minute Hero', Pauline Black asks the audience what time they got up in the morning, if they work in factories and she substitutes some of the official lyrics for "fucking mess". Black also uses a heavy London accent here which, together with the strong language and what she says, gives the impression of a bond, an affinity with the audience, putting across the message that the band identifies with the everyday mundanities, adding an authenticity (The Selecter 1980). In 'Ghost Town', for example, The Specials affect Jamaican patois "and the music played in a de boomtown". Theorists say that songs can often be interpreted differently – and can sometimes depend on the time they are listened to. Some songs have been used by political parties or other groups where the artist may have intended a completely different meaning to the one being perceived by the group currently using the song. Frith cites the 1973 song 'Part of the Union', which was supposed to be an anti-union song, but the catchy chorus was taken up and started to be sung by strikers on picket lines throughout Britain (Frith 1996: 166). Negus uses the example of 'Imagine' by John Lennon that comes with a radical text ...but can be open to question. Negus points out that the listener is asked to imagine, so if the song is political, there is a big gap between the sentiment for change evoked in the lyrics and practical political activity that might be needed to bring on such change (Negus 1996: 194). Tony Blair's Labour party used 'Things Can Only Get Better' by D:Ream in 1997 which had been a fairly recent song and easily interpreted into an anthem for a new, young political party gaining power (even though it was probably originally written as a love song). Tony Blair

was playing host to some of the most prominent pop musicians of the time including Noel Gallagher from the Manchester band, Oasis.

I would suggest that the political lyrics of the Two-tone bands' songs were offering a very clear political message, that was very much of the time, especially as named references are often included, like Margaret Thatcher. In terms of practical solutions, the Two-tone bands seemed to offer solutions in their songs, rather than just protest – as in The Specials' 'Why?' and The Beat's 'Stand Down Margaret'. Both are good examples of songs which not only criticise political reality but offer solutions, such as in The Beat's case, getting rid of the then Prime Minister.

The Two-tone bands, along with many other post-punk artists, had strong left-wing affiliations and were damning of Thatcher's Conservative government at the time. Bracket stresses the importance of exploring the contextual factors surrounding a song – what was on the news, whether a general election loomed and how much this might have an impact on a band (Bracket 2000: 172). There was a general election in 1979, the year that Two-tone emerged, moreover many of the lyrics of the Two-tone bands reflected what was happening politically and what was shown on the news. The song 'Ghost Town' not only reflected what was on the news, but was used at the time as an accompaniment to news footage of the riots in 1981 on some of the American networks (Byers 2015).

As mentioned previously, authenticity could be found in many areas of an artist's work such as their music and performance. According to Connell and Gibson, live music is important as it gives context to a communication between musicians and audiences perceived to be the most direct – which harks back to a pre-capitalist era (Connell and Gibson 2003: 19). This correlates with the pub rock/punk scene in shunning the grandiose, hi-tech music of the stadium rockers for the grass-roots sound, playing small venues. Connell and Gibson go on to suggest that where pop

music combined entertainment with social identity and values such as resistance, alienation and marginality, it could be classed as authentic, though where it was influenced by the economic interests of the establishment it lost political edge and therefore its authenticity (Connell and Gibson 2003: 41). During the 1970s, punk and reggae were good examples of this rebellion and Two-tone bands continued with lyrics pertaining to the above. Also, it is suggested, that where any form of pop music has, besides other things, claimed some heritage, in relation to instruments, local performers or ethnicity, and evoked live experience, it can be considered to be authentic (Connell and Gibson 2003: 43). Two-tone bands satisfied this criteria not least in their live shows, with some live recordings also included on albums as some artists had done previously. Musical instruments, such as the brass and organ were also used by the original ska musicians and could therefore be seen as signifiers of authenticity.

The Two-tone bands' lyrics were generally unambiguous, though they also used elements besides the words in a process, described by Machin as multimodal discourses, to influence comprehension. Machin argues that multimodal discourses can include physical appearance and gesture, use of voice, accent (as mentioned previously) and video. The film documentary *Dance Craze* show various Two-tone bands' performances, recorded at various nightclubs around the UK, filmed during 1980. The film illustrates various techniques used in some of the performances by the bands to engage with their audiences. The opening clip of The Specials' 'Nite Klub' shows Terry Hall more or less ordering the audience to "clap your hands, stamp your feet", while Neville Staple dances, almost trance-like, just managing to keep his feet with the beat, which becomes faster and at one point dives onto the floor. The audience responds enthusiastically (The Specials 1980).

Sound effects, like in film, can also sometimes be used as an effective tool for which a band can communicate – often sounds of the city are used, like traffic noise,

police sirens to conjure up a particular scene. It would often be transport that provided the sound effect, for example the sound of a car starting up is used in Roxy Music's 1975 hit 'Love is the Drug' and a helicopter was used at the beginning of Pink Floyd's 1979 hit 'Another Brick in the Wall'. The Specials used this technique in the sound of brakes of a car being deployed suddenly, emulating one of the original ska artists Prince Buster, for their first single 'Gangsters' and for the anti-violence song 'Concrete Jungle', used the sound of glass being broken, adding an extra realism to what the lyrics were portraying.

Substitution of lyrics was also used by The Specials and The Beat – 'Concrete Jungle', for example, has a few versions, depending on the audience and whether a performance is being officially recorded. The opening has the England football chant 1,2; 1, 2, 3; 1, 2, 3, 4 and is done with clapping and sometimes no lyrics. At a gig at Tiffany's nightclub in Coventry the following lyrics were used "you're going home in a Coventry ambulance 'cause you're going to get your fucking head kicked in" (The Specials 1979), which is a chant sometimes used at the time on the football terraces. This use of a contemporary chant by the band, including the strong language, highlights Two-tone's desire to engage with their audience and fans.

The Beat, when playing the song 'Stand Down Margaret' at concerts in America, sometimes substituted the name to "Stand Down Ronnie", referring to Ronald Reagan, the then American President, whose Republican policies of monetarism were similar to those of Margaret Thatcher's. This of course was intended to make the lyrics more relevant to the American audience. In the song 'Gangsters', The Specials reference Bernie Rhodes, manager of The Clash who organised The Specials trip to Paris. During a performance in 1979, Staple chants "B E R N I E" letter by letter then toasts "don't call me Scarface, my name is Bernie Rhodes" (The

Specials 1979) – the Scarface reference to Al Capone, the famous Chicago gangster, is a clear expression of what the band thought of Rhodes and many in the music management business at the time. At a New York performance on the final part of their American tour, the ticket price had been inflated by a promoter, Ron Delsner, which annoyed the band and so they dedicated the song to Delsner, substituting Rhodes's name for Delsner's (Bushell 1980). On *The Old Grey Whistle Test* performance of 'Too Much Too Young', Terry Hall introduced the song "This is probably the only chance you will get to see it on television because other family programmes like *Top of the Pops* find it offensive" (BBC2 1979). So if the bands were annoyed by a particular individual/organisation they were keen to voice their opinion.

When discussing live performance Cohen suggests that evaluation of a gig can depend largely on the boundary between audience/performer and that this can vary according to social, cultural and other conceptual factors. She uses examples of the punk bands attempting to bridge the boundary by involving the audience in performances (Cohen 2001: 95). The Specials, quite literally, wanted to take away boundaries between them and their audience by allowing fans to join them on stage on a regular basis, usually at the end of a performance. This was an alternative level of engagement from the spitting/'gobbing' that occurred at many punk gigs, becoming regarded as a sign of appreciation, and as Viv Albertine, from The Slits opined, it seemed like a removing of boundaries between bands and audience (Albertine 2014: 174). During a concert in 1979, while The Specials performed 'Gangsters', many audience members got on stage, dancing alongside Neville Staple and Terry Hall. Hall seems to quickly eye up the situation, deems it to be safe and continues with his singing. Staple clearly revels in being joined by members of the audience and their enthusiasm and at one point, shares his microphone for a fan to sing along (The Specials 1979).

Allowing members of the audience to join the band on stage did not always go to plan, however. In an interview Jerry Dammers explained that at first it was good fun but after a while people started to get on stage too early into the set which could be “tedious and dangerous” leading, often, to arguments with bouncers. Terry Hall would often intervene to keep fans off stage when the situation was getting out of hand, using various tactics. In a review of a concert in Bristol in September 1980, Salewicz reports that Terry Hall tells the fans who have invaded the stage too early, that the stage is just their (The Specials) prison and that the band did not want the audience to become “prisoners of the record industry”. Generally though the band were happy for fans to be on stage and Hall commented that as they had paid their money, why not, and that it was often the bouncers attitude he had more of a problem with (Salewicz 1980). This sometimes resulted in Hall throwing a piece of equipment at a bouncer, berating them for what he considered was a too heavy handed approach towards members of the audience. Another technique that The Selecter used as a means of trying to get their message across was during the performance of ‘Too Much Pressure’, members of the band would carry out a mock fight which they would make as realistic as possible. Black explained that was the reason that the band engaged in the mock fight during the song – to attempt to demonstrate how fighting looked horrible and was ultimately futile in settling problems (Black 2011:79).

Toasting, which would often incorporate the Jamaican patois element, was a popular technique used by the bands to add lyrics and engage further with the audience. Again, this goes back to the original ska musicians in Jamaica in the 1960s, often as a means to spread news/gossip. The Two-tone bands used it as a useful tool to express their feelings and political views, adapting it from gauging the audience. This could be useful in all sorts of ways, including crossing racial boundaries. Ranking Roger had already gained a reputation for his toasting on the Birmingham club circuit prior to joining The Beat and, if hearing racist comments

from the audience would sometimes chant “fuck off, fuck off National Front”. At a performance in 1980, during the song ‘Stand Down Margaret’, part of Roger’s toast is “war war war war” and punches his fist in the air along with the beat (The Beat 1980).

3.3.1 Video

The use of video to accompany a song, a fairly new medium at the time, was also embraced by the Two-tone bands, especially The Specials, and I shall consider Machin’s theories when describing some of these videos. Simon Frith points out that one of the innovative aspects of video production is that video performance is not restricted to usual performance settings – that while many films do show the performers on stage or in a recording studio, some move them out of a musical context and into the everyday or fantastical (Frith 1996: 225). The Two-Tone bands varied their use of video, similarly using both studio and outside settings and The Specials’ ‘Ghost Town’, probably one of the most iconic music videos of all time, took the band out of a musical context, using the setting to help illustrate the rhetoric of the song.

The video to accompany the song ‘Ghost Town’ was shot in the city of London between 11.00pm and 6.00am (Byers 2016). This was chosen, according to Byers, because the film production crew were based in London and so was practical. The location of the city of London was also somewhere that would have empty streets at night as it is an area with a 9 to 5 banking culture and not somewhere that has a nightlife scene like the West End. An article in The Independent newspaper, describe the video as a “road trip through post-apocalyptically empty London streets” (Bignell and Higgins: 2011). The buildings along Bank and Threadneedle Street are very grand, which doesn’t reflect the concrete Brutalist architecture that was the usual backdrop for The Specials lyrics though the opening clips of the video

show some high rise tower blocks, filmed either elsewhere in London or another city. As with the lyrics of their songs The Specials did not refer to particular locations – the city, or in this case town, meaning city or large town, was a generic term that could refer to anywhere in the UK at the time. Even though the video was filmed in London, there was no London landmark included and so this could resonate with youth anywhere in the UK.

The band members are filmed travelling in a car through the empty streets at night, with Terry Hall driving. There is a melancholy sound and haunting solo flute/horn at the beginning, then strident brass, haunted-house organ and loping (reggae) bass (Bignell and Higgins 2011). The lyrics “This town is coming like a ghost town” are very clear and the empty city streets being shown as the car is travelling through, echoing exactly what is being sung. The band members are all in the car, it is evening time and they look as if they are looking for some fun, somewhere to go to have a good time, but there is no excitement to be found.

Another part of the song changes in mood and tempo when reminiscing on previous good times before the city became a ghost town – “do you remember the good old days before the ghost town, we danced and sung and the music played in a da boomtown”. During this part of the song the band members appear to liven up, with cheerful expressions and wave their arms around in time to the music. There is also a change from a low colour saturation, where the film almost looks in black and white, to high colour saturation whilst going through a tunnel. Machin’s theory suggests that high colour saturation is a discourse used to suggest liveliness and fun and low colour saturation can invoke a feeling of mean and moodiness, lacking in energy (Machin 2010: 195). The video also includes an image of a shadow of two people fighting during the lyrics “too much fighting on the dancefloor”, using the video setting cleverly to mirror the lyrics of the song. The end of the film shows the band members in the early hours of the morning, throwing stones into the water of

the river (Thames), surrounded by empty warehouses in a dreary setting, probably further east from the city of London, again with low saturated colours. The lyrics “This town is coming like a ghost town” are being repeated, faded out and a solo beat is played before the end of the song. The band members look bored, their evening has been an anti-climax. When analysing The Clash’s video to ‘London’s Calling’, Machin described punk bands’ discourses as having no romanticism of the inner-city (Machin 2010: 195). The unglamorous side of the inner city is also a picture that was portrayed by The Specials in this video.

The Beat’s ‘Mirror In The Bathroom’, a song about narcissism, was written by singer Dave Wakeling who took inspiration when he was working on a building site in Birmingham. Wakeling, in an interview on BBC1’s *One Show* said that when he was shaving one day he thought about how people can become fixated with themselves and noticed all the ‘shiny stainless steel’ architecture being built in Birmingham at that time (BBC1 2015). The architecture, with mirrored glass in some cases, seemed to complement the narcissism. The band used facilities in Birmingham for the video, though, like The Specials, did not use any local landmarks to indicate a specific location. The Rum Runner nightclub in the city centre was used for filming indoor scenes, though it could have been any large nightclub. This included a scene showing lines of sinks with mirrors above in the men’s toilet, so a literal interpretation of the lyrics ‘Mirror in the Bathroom’. The film then cuts to the band performing on stage, with large mirrored stands behind them. This is an upbeat performance, using high colour saturation, with close ups of Ranking Roger enthusiastically dancing and Saxa performing his saxophone solo. At one point the video cuts to Dave Steele walking along a busy city centre shopping street, which was filmed at Birmingham’s Corporation Street, looking in shop windows with a confident swagger, to catch his own reflection in the store. This scene uses the film to literally echo what the lyrics say “.every Saturday you’ll see me window shopping, find no interest in the racks and shelves just to glance at

the reflection of my own sweet self". Interestingly C&A is used as part of the title of The Specials 'Man at C&A' the following year, but in The Beat's video C&A is not given prominence, the sign just happens to be in shot. The video cuts into the band performing on stage again and as the lyrics 'Mirror in the Bathroom' are repeated towards the end, the film shows band members finding their reflection in various shiny objects surrounding them.

So again, like The Specials 'Ghost Town', this film is used to reflect the lyrics of the song. There are differences though as 'Mirror in the Bathroom' is an upbeat song, made in early 1980 at the start of The Beat's career when Two-tone was a new phenomenon – the video incorporates narcissism with the shiny new architecture of the city/nightclub and the city is portrayed as glamorous and vibrant, with plenty of people, which is in contrast to The Specials' 'Ghost Town' made over a year later. Also, I would argue that, as the bands were all reflecting what was around them, Birmingham, being a bigger city with a big service industry, did have modern architecture being built at the time Wakeling wrote the song in the late 1970s and had not felt as devastated as Coventry by the decline of the motor industry as it had not been so wholly reliant on it.

The video to accompany The Selecter's 'Too Much Pressure', released in 1979, is of the band recording the song in a studio, which was The Horizon studios in Coventry. The setting of the recording studio, where the band members are all playing their instruments or singing, gives an authenticity as it shows just the band members rather than any producers adding or changing things and the studios look fairly old, so giving the impression of not having too much wizardry to come between musician and listener. The video allows the viewer to see the band members, using their various instruments, in a studio environment which focuses the attention on the sound. The Beat's 'Mirror in the Bathroom' video cuts in a few times to the band's performance on stage, also allowing the viewer to see the band members'

various musical roles, thereby showing a coherence. The Specials video differs in that none of the band members are shown playing instruments and all join in the singing – they are out of a musical setting. By then though The Specials was a well-known band, having had much chart success and various TV appearances over the previous two years. I would agree, therefore that it would not have been considered important to show the band members' individual talents.

The Selecter, like The Specials, were also filmed giving performances in a TV studio setting to accompany some of their earlier single releases. The video for 'On My Radio' shows The Selecter looking very cohesive as a band, with all members in sharp matching suits and following a general black and white theme: this is the case for The Specials' 'Gangsters'. The Selecter's Pauline Black, Gaps Hendricks and Charley Anderson execute some impressive footwork part way through the song where the whole band come together as a very proficient, stylish and energetic ensemble.

Street brings in Frith's argument that music is a potent medium in the realisation of identity (Street 1997: 38). Street suggests that fashion can help to constitute an identity, through which political meaning can be gained as part of an identity incorporating sounds, styles, words and images of popular culture. (Street 1997: 38). Jerry Dammers was aware of how important image was and designed the Two-tone logo himself. The black and white membership of the groups was represented visually with black and white checks from the pop-art movement of the 1960s, the decade of the original ska music, and an image based on a photograph of Peter Tosh from reggae band The Wailers was used as to represent Two-tone Records (see Fig 1).



Fig 1 – Logo for 2Tone Label

Hebdige confirms that Dammers was keen to get all the details regarding appearance right: that the Two-tone package consisted of “image and sound, together with an attitude and posture on, amongst other things, race”. (Hebdige 2000: 107).

The Selecter’s performance in ‘On My Radio’ is in contrast to the group’s video accompanying the song ‘Celebrate The Bullet’, an anti-violence, anti-war song made in 1981, after the group had left the Two-tone label. The Selecter’s sound, like that of the other two bands, had changed by 1981 and was now eclectic. This song included prominent use of the electric guitar and had a slower, more dub reggae sound than their earlier ska. The mood of the song was sombre and the location for the video was an underground cavern. The saxophonist is in silhouette which creates an effective, shadowy eeriness, similar to the shadow of the fighting in ‘Ghost Town’, also part filmed in a tunnel. The colours are generally low in saturation due to the fact the film is shot in a cavern but there is also harshly saturated colour coming through the cavern – perhaps giving the impression of a post-nuclear glow. Pauline Black gives a very different performance from earlier songs: no energetic bouncing around the stage, instead she is fairly static at the

microphone, dressed in a fashionable pencil skirt and wearing her hair loose, showing off an 'afro' style. The use of video to show a change of style and music was effective here, perhaps showing a more sombre mood, to accompany more hard-hitting lyrics.

This was an era just before videos really took off so Two-tone bands were fairly innovative in producing videos – in May 1981 23% of songs in the USA Billboard Hot 100 chart had accompanying videos but by May 1986 this had increased to 82% - this sudden rise was mainly due to the start of MTV (Banks 1997: 293).

Before this era, during the 1970s, accompanying videos had mainly been used as a practical tool by international bands such as Abba and Blondie, as a way for British audiences to see them perform the song as they would not always be available to appear on *Top of the Pops* or other music shows. One of the reasons being that it was cheaper to make a film than it was to transport the bands over to the UK for a few days. By the late 1970s, however, various bands started to see the potential of video as an effective way of marketing a song.

Jerry Dammers, who had enjoyed making films at Polytechnic, embraced the medium and directed the videos that accompanied some of The Specials songs, using for example Lanchester Polytechnic to film the video for their song 'Rat Race', with students who had recently taken some exams, to act out the scene of sitting an exam (Byers: 2015). This certainly fits with notions of authenticity, using a genuine exam set-up and local facilities.

3.4 Analysis of Lyrics as Political Commentary

In this section I will explore the lyrics of a selection of songs by the three bands under different themes - determining how they were relevant to the political/socioeconomic climate and whether they captured the mood of the time. Two-tone groups sang about a range of political and social topics including unemployment, monetarism, terrorism; nuclear war, violence, racism, angst and social class. The lyrics and references to key figures of the era locate the songs firmly in the period between 1979 and 1981 and include the naming of politicians such as Margaret Thatcher as well as organisations like The National Front. The bands, like many at the time, were left-wing in their political views and were keen to articulate their political standpoint within their songs. As Roddy Byers said in an interview with me, “we all hated Thatcher” (Byers 2016). Pauline Black also commented “there was a lot to be angry about (in the late 1970s/early 1980s) – we had the National Front marching on the streets..” (Skinheads/Rude Boys and The Selecter, BBC4 2014). Byers said the bands generally sang about what they knew and what they saw others around them experiencing (Byers 2015).

As a result of war damage, much reconstruction of British cities took place between the mid-1950s and late 1960s. During this time most of the major motorways were built and in some cases old town centres were destroyed and new ones built. By the 1970s the concrete architecture was subject to criticism and became a central theme in many examples of music from this period. The style of architecture seemed to exacerbate inner-city problems of violence and quickly looked run down, attracting lots of graffiti. As briefly mentioned in the first chapter, it was also criticised for its role in isolating individuals from one another. Where earlier housing had made it possible for people to socialise on the street, the new high-rise ‘streets in the sky’ were unpopular with residents, many of whom preferred the terraced housing they used to live in. Rex and Tomlinson describe how tower blocks rose

from demolition sites and from the new network of urban motorways making them even more terrifying for isolated pedestrians (Rex & Tomlinson 1979: 134).

Coventry in particular is a good example of a city featuring brutalist architecture at the time, and the associated concrete landscape is conveyed in several of the Two-tone songs via the lyrics. Reynolds describes Coventry thus “few urban jungles are as wall-to-wall concrete as Coventry” (Reynolds 2005: 284). His observations resonate with the words of some of the following songs where the subject provides an important background. Some of the official photographs taken of The Specials shows them against a back-drop of high-rise concrete buildings.

3.4.1 Sound/Performance

All three bands placed importance on dancing and having a good time – “people hadn’t danced for years” (Byers 2016). Eddington cites Roy Edridge, the Executive from Chrysalis, who signed The Specials, describing the band after seeing them for the first time in May 1979, “the best unsigned live group I have ever seen. Energy, passion, politics, they made you dance, they made you think” (Eddington 2004: 83). Though disco music ran parallel with the punk era, and was music to dance to, it did not necessarily appeal to all sectors of the community. Northern Soul, a movement and a term given to generally rare soul singles, was brought over from America by disc jockeys and played at venues like Wigan Casino and Blackpool Mecca.

Dancing to the 4/4 beat was the most important thing with ever more impressive moves, usually performed by the men. These ‘all-nighters’ were mainly based in the North West and reached as far as the North Midlands so London and Birmingham largely missed out on this scene. However, local dj Pete Waterman of Coventry’s Soul Hole had come across the scene and played some of the records in Coventry. Interest in Northern Soul declined by the late 1970s and perhaps Two-tone, as it was emerging, reinvigorated dance in the form of black soul-influenced music for

the West Midlands. Two-tone performances were particularly energetic with a style of dancing, (a sort of fast sideways skank from one foot to the other), which became popular with fans throughout the UK. According to Ranking Roger “The music was happy, the lyrics sad” (Stubbs 2012).

The Selecter’s sound, as described by Mike Stand in 1980, had “jumpy bass and drum rhythms, fat melody lines from the organ and further embroidery from the two guitars” (Stand 1980). The band were energetic on stage, with all members moving to the music. An *NME* review describes the audience as leaping to the music, in response to the Selecter’s “unrehearsed capriciousness, dashing about, knocking each other over in enthusiasm, whilst never missing a note” (Pearson 1980). Likewise Goldman describes Pauline Black, lead vocalist, on stage as “everywhere, bouncing from foot to foot and the whole of the group bobbing and weaving” (Goldman 1980).

The Specials exuded a similar energy on stage – in a 1979 performance reviewed in *Music Machine*, Ellen enthuses that “their compelling set comprises of a few fast strict reggae standards and their own vibrant, direct, rhythmic dub/rock numbers, with flawless on-beat drumming, cross-rhythm bass, insistent thin guitar and dominant keyboards...the ultimate dance music” (Ellen 1979). Another review describes a performance thus “Hall (Terry) static, looking like the eye of a hurricane with his bandmates a whirling powerhouse, especially Staple (Neville) athletically hurtling around the stage (Bushell 1980). It describes how, at one stage, Jerry Dammers left his keyboards, appearing to collapse on stage, lying still then Neville Staple descending on him to raise Dammers’ head grinning to the audience. (Bushell 1980). As Bushell suggested, The Selecter took the same ska roots as The Specials and re-interpreted them in a slightly different way (Bushell 1980). Neol Davies explained that there was a different balance of influences between the

two groups, as there were fourteen musicians involved, who had been in rock bands, soul bands and reggae bands – a hybrid that worked (Rambali 1979).

The Beat had a more eclectic sound, the drumming described by Mike Stand at the time as being a “metronome, mechanical approach and that the band seemed to slam loose-limbed ska together with Euroneumusik” (Stand 1980). According to Horace Panter The Beat sounded a bit like The Velvet Underground – and Everett Morton could only play the drums in a certain way, which provided the band with their unique sound (Panter 2015). In an interview, Dave Wakeling claimed some of the musical influences, as well as punk and ska, were Tamla Motown, the Rolling Stones and David Bowie (Wakeling 2016). The Beat’s main energy powerhouse came from Ranking Roger, one half of the vocal duo that fronted this band. A review described his performance as “manic, double-speed skank – hurtling around, flinging himself about” (Goldman 1979). Garratt of the *NME* described The Beat as militant, joyful dance music (Garratt 1981). When interviewing Dave Wakeling recently, he explained to me that the group “wanted to find an aggregate groove” (Wakeling 2016). They incorporated a “variety of dance rhythms, keeping the audience in a state of perpetual motion” (Garrett 1981).

3.4.2 Socio-political Themes

The following section explores themes included in Two-tone songs such as violence, racism, politics, social angst/class, unemployment and war. 1979 was a particularly bad year for racist attacks and muggings (Reynolds 2005: 283) and the song ‘Do the Dog’ the third track on The Specials’ first album released in 1979 contained lyrics describing some of the rivalry and tribalism between musical subcultures of that era. Jerry Dammers, who wrote the song, explained that there were lots of different music tribes around at the same time in the late 1970s,

thinking they were all rebels but to some extent were fighting each other. He thought that this suited the “people in power, keeping everyone down” (Dammers as cited in Rachel 2016: 245).

“All you punks and all you teds, National Front and Natti dreds;
Mods, rockers, hippies and skinheads, keep on fighting ‘till you’re dead”

Punks and teds refers to punk music fans and late 1950s rock’n’roll fans (teddy boys). Mod revivalists as mentioned previously, were fans of some of the new wave mod groups like The Jam and The Who whereas rockers were fans of the heavy rock/rock music like Black Sabbath, Deep Purple, Status Quo. There was a lot of tribalism within music and football during the 1970s and it was often reflected in the clothes people wore. Richard Grabel wrote in *The New Yorker*, that it was a fact of life in 1980 that the pop music audience was fragmented, particularly in England, where style had always meant more in youth culture than in the USA, and that this fragmentation could often be expressed in tribalism. He commented that whereas “mods, punks, rude boys...disco” fans sometimes found gigs at which they would mix and have a good time together, they would often keep to themselves and even come to blows with each other (Grabel 1980). As Adrian Goldberg remembered “it was an era of unprecedented tribalism” (BBC Radio 6 2015). On the same show Paul Morley reminisces about young people constructing an identity around music – observing that it could be a “matter of life or death”. He enthused that the music was about who you were – it could be ideological and political and could differentiate you from capitalist forces and other areas and “wars were fought” over different sorts of music (BBC Radio 6 2015).

The song continues: “Take your F.A. aggravation, fight it out on New Street station;
Master racial masturbation, causes National Front frustration”. This is one of the few times that The Specials make reference to a West Midlands landmark, as in

New Street station, the main train station in the centre of Birmingham. The second two lines refer to racism and the naming of the National Front again.

“Who am I to say? To the IRA; to the UDA; Soldier boy from UK
Am I just a hypocrite? Another piece of your bullshit;
Am I the dog the bit, the hand of the man that feeds it?”

The IRA, Irish Republican Army, was the terrorist organisation which attacked mainland Britain several times throughout the 1970s and in November 1974 two pubs in the centre of Birmingham were bombed and 21 people killed (BBC 2016). This created some tension in the city, especially towards the Irish community and the following year’s St Patrick’s Day Parade was cancelled, only to be reinstated several years later.

Two tracks that were included on The Selecter’s first album *Too Much Pressure* describe a scene of violence at night, and both provide good examples of where ‘the street’ is used to conjure up an urban, inner city location, without referring to any city in particular. These are some lines from ‘Out on the Street’ which clearly refer to the narrator anticipating coming across violence of some sort, if going out at night.

“White lies and amber lighting, try to seduce me
I don’t wanna go there again, but it’s the only place to go..
There’s gonna be trouble I know, don’t wanna know”

Another song by The Selecter called ‘Danger’, carries a similar theme in the lines

“city streets and city lights, don’t impress me...
I got to pass the time away, trouble walking right behind”

Both songs paint a picture of the cities in the UK in general being fairly dangerous places at night at the time. This was especially the case for the West Indian and Asian population who were easy targets for racists and, as music and football were particularly tribal at the time, there could be all sorts of reasons why someone might be targeted for 'trouble'. As mentioned earlier, the sus law is suggested in this song and West Indian youth, in particular seemed to be disproportionately targeted by police in this area. By 1979, when Two-tone formed, racism had started to spill over to music concerts and it seemed to be a small element of the skinhead faction in particular which acquired a reputation for racist behaviour. The racism had started at a few of the punk gigs, and Two-tone music, with strong links to 1960s ska, for which the original skinhead and mod groups were fans, attracted a skinhead following.

The National Front began to target football fans and skinheads as a source of recruitment instigating racist propaganda at football matches and concerts in an effort to get publicity (Petridis 2002). A gig in Bristol that Pauline Black recalls in her autobiography probably provides a good snapshot of what was happening at venues at this time. There were different factions (music tribes) in the audience, including mods, punks and skinheads and tensions had started to grow even though Black had greeted the different groups, no doubt wanting to embrace the mix of people coming to the same music gig to have a good time. She recalls that a faction of the mods started chanting "we are the mods.." then a group of the skinheads raised a union jack flag and after a stage invasion a fight broke out that escalated "like a forest fire" (Black 2011: 157- 59). As Black notes, the music that the instigators were dancing to had been about unity, though she comments that the trouble was not related solely to black and white unity, but that competing teenage factions were also involved (Black 2011: 159).

What was probably that same concert was covered in an article and interview with The Selecter in the *Melody Maker* music journal in October 1979 called 'The Coventry Syndrome'. John Orme, the journalist, reports that whilst walking into a pub round the corner from the venue in Bristol, with Pauline Black and Arthur (Gappa) Hendrickson, to interview them before the gig, the landlady looked at them and said "no, not in here" in what Orme described as "blank prejudice". He then goes on to describe other incidents during the evening pretty much as Pauline Black recounts. He also enthuses about the band's performance and reports on band member Charlie Anderson's comments on the growth of the Coventry music community "working on co-operation rather than competition" and the individual members having known each other and played together in various units for five years. Orme also goes on to comment about the serious messages in their songs; 'On My Radio', for example, as mentioned earlier, "painting a dismal picture" of radio programming (Orme 1979).

The Two-tone groups were obviously keen to use music journals as another way to convey their message and another example is, from that same tour when an article appeared in the 3rd November 1979 issue of *Melody Maker* titled 'Cut out the Aggro say 2-Tone Bands' which was an appeal for troublemakers to stay away from further concerts after some apparent organised violence the previous week. The bands emphasised in the piece that they detested violence and that "anyone looking for a fight was completely unwelcome at any 2-Tone dances" (Melody Maker 1979).

There was a large piece on The Beat in a May 1981 edition of the *NME* which included extracts from recorded conversations with Ranking Roger, Andy Cox and Everett Morton, report of a talk show on which Dave Wakeling appeared and general descriptions of the band's performances. Various topics are covered by the band members, including the desire for unity and their opposition to nuclear warfare. (Murray 1981).

Horace Panter remembers that The Specials only occasionally had problems with people in the audience giving Nazi salutes. He describes one incident in Bracknell where groups of skinheads from different towns had turned up, identifiable by allegiance to football teams. During the show “a dozen or so” were sieg heiling, at which point the band stopped playing and “led by Jerry and Terry, jumped over the barrier and into the crowd, where the meatheads were chased from the building by the artists they had paid to see” (Panter 2008: 247). At a Specials concert in Cambridge, the performance had to be stopped three times because of crowd trouble and when band members deemed the bouncers’ methods towards unruly fans too heavy-handed, they intervened by trying to stop the bouncers themselves. This resulted in Jerry Dammers and Terry Hall being arrested for behaviour likely to lead to a breach of the peace (Panter 2008: 239-250).

Coventry generally had a good reputation for good race relations but in the early part of 1981 tensions seemed to mount and the Asian communities in particular were the target for far right groups who had made Coventry a focus for recruitment. This was at a time when its industries were collapsing causing the sharp increase in unemployment. Two racially motivated murders took place, one of a student, and one a young doctor (Troth 2013: vii). An article in the *Coventry Evening Telegraph* refers to a programme appearing on BBC2’s *Brass Tacks* on 13 July 1981, called ‘Focus on Coventry’s Race Issues’, where the producer visited the city for two months to film various groups. Lynval Golding’s lyrics, written after he’d been attacked are poignant.

“I have to defend myself from attack last night, I know I’m black, you know you are white...

Why did you try to hurt me? Did you really want to kill me?”

Why's lyrics go on to reference the racist organisations; the National Front, British Movement and Ku Klux Klan, and the phrase 'Nazi salute and steel capped boot' is used several times in the second half of the song. It seems to read pretty much like a report of what Golding suffered that evening and felt about the situation. The lyrics refer to dance halls which, as late-night venues, were settings for trouble which often spilled onto the streets. Golding, throughout the song, asks why? There is frustration, anger and bewilderment in the lyrics, as to why there were people wanting to commit such attacks. In addition to offering social commentary on the problems of contemporary racism, the lyrics attempt to promote the concepts of unity and peace. As, for example, in the following lines from the song where Golding says:

“I just wanna live in peace, why can't you be the same;
Why should I live in fear, this fussing and fighting's insane”

These are direct challenges to racism, made all the more powerful through the use of direct address via the pronoun 'you'. It was released in June 1981 as the 'B' side to 'Ghost Town', a song which also refers to the fighting taking place on dance floors throughout the country. Brixton had already seen rioting a couple of months prior to this record being released, and then the following month rioting broke out in many towns and cities across the UK.

The song 'Two Swords' by The Beat is also of interest because of its direct references to the issue of racism and more particularly, the involvement of The National Front. It was included on the group's first album *I Just Can't Stop It*, where again, The National Front is referenced, in this case as 'the Front'. The lyrics also indicate that there seems to be violence for the sake of it and that some of the youth is fighting out of their frustration

“I’ve never been one for the punch-up, but look I really hate them Nazis....
Are you fighting the Front or just fronting a fight
Sometimes it’s hard to see the left from the right
Are we angry are we looking for peace, or just trying to win the war
When two swords slashing at each other only sharpen one another
And in the long run even he’s your brudda.....even though that kid’s a nazi”

Social topics such as general angst, dissatisfaction, social class and narcissism were embraced in all three bands’ lyrics. ‘Too Much Pressure’ and ‘Three Minute Hero’ are a couple of good examples by The Selecter where the lyrics sum up the day to day frustrations and tensions experienced by many young people. The narrator seems to highlight disparity in wealth and social class between themselves and ‘them’. There is some resentment shown towards ‘them’, which could mean people who are more wealthy, more middle class perhaps, those who are part of the establishment. Then exclaiming them to have no joy is a similar inference to lyrics in The Specials’ ‘Rat Race’ – suggesting that people who are, perhaps in a nine-to-five city job may have an easier life financially, but perhaps lack joy because of a corporate, monotonous existence. The phrase “too much pressure” is constantly repeated at the start of most lines and there isn’t a usual defined verse-chorus structure; just continuous declarations of “too much pressure” – then reasons why, for example “Too much pressure, my man make me sad; too much pressure, him try to make me look small; too much pressure, end up with no money; too much pressure, my car fail its MOT”.

Neol Davies explained that he wrote the song because of frustration at many things – he was in a band at the time called Transposed Men with John Bradbury, who left to join The Specials, leaving Davies without a band for a while. He was also short of money, and his car had failed its MOT (Eddington 2004:91). The narrator then brings in other factors for their woes, referring to ‘them’.

Too much pressure, them having it easy; Too much pressure, them sail through
life;

Davies explained that another contributing factor providing this pressure was to do with class – his wife was going through problems at art college and Davies thought that this was because she did not have a middle class accent (Eddington 2004: 91). Interestingly, unlike The Specials and The Beat, The Selecter did not have any members who had been to art college, which, as mentioned previously had been one of the routes in which bands would form and prided themselves to a certain extent for bucking the trend (Marshall 1993: 38).

The band had some similar subject matter in the song 'Three Minute Hero'.

"It's too early in the morning, stupid job
Don't want to eat, can't think straight; same as yesterday"

There's a repetition of "just another day with that endless grey drone" throughout the song. This is describing someone with a bored existence, going through the monotony with nothing to look forward to. The narrator has a job that he does not like and is causing him stress, because of general angst at the life he is leading and not being able to see a light at the end of the tunnel. As mentioned previously, this generation grew up in an era which was full of optimism about the future, with exciting prospects and opportunities, they were boom years particularly in the West Midlands. So the bleak prospects by the late 1970s came as a huge shock and disappointment.

The Beat's "Big Shot" criticises corporate greed and, like The Selecter's "Too Much Pressure", shows some resentment.

“Yes, I’ve seen you go to work in your big car...

You’re a big shot, you want the whole lot;

And if I like it or not, you still control me”

Here the narrator is revealing himself as an oppressed victim. The second verse switches to the voice of the ‘Big Shot’

“I like to sneer as I sail past your bus stop... I wonder round in my empty office block

And if you like it or not, I still control you”

Harsh words are used like ‘control’ and ‘sneer’ and seem to describe someone, the Big Shot, as being rather pretentious, not deserving of his wealth, lacking merit. It was during the Thatcher era of the 1980s that a rise in self-made entrepreneurs became prevalent and this song reflects on a certain type who emerged in that era.

“You look like a government minister or a high-ranking military officer;

I don’t think you are, you’re a big shot who wants a whole lot”.

One of the other topics included in the bands’ lyrics was unemployment and as the Conservatives monetarist policies started to take effect, not least in the West Midlands, the subject must have been hard to avoid. The song “Stand Down Margaret” by The Beat, a direct plea to the then British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, to resign, was released in 1980, just a year after the Conservative government was elected.

“I see no joy, I see only sorry; I see no chance of your bright new tomorrow;

So stand down Margaret, stand down please....

You tell me how can it work in this all white law;
What a short sharp lesson, what a third world war
Say too much war in the city; I said a love and unity the only way”

There are quite a few topics, relevant at that time, intertwining here. As mentioned in previous chapters, the monetarist policy adopted by the new Conservative party in 1979 saw an even sharper rise in unemployment than had already taken place, particularly in the manufacturing industries dominating the West Midlands. The use of the phrase “all white law” would suggest a government that mainly has the interests of the white population in its policies. Also, Dave Wakeling explains in Daniel Rachel’s book that this was a bit of satire, written by Andy Cox – referring to Geoffrey Howe and William Whitelaw, who were cabinet ministers in Margaret Thatcher’s government at the time (Rachel 2016: 280). World War is mentioned so referring to the threat of a third World War, which The Beat obviously thought was a real possibility under the Thatcher government. The proceeds from the sale of the song were given to CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament).

The bands supported various causes as well as Rock Against Racism, performing at benefit concerts including for the unemployed; the NME reported reduced ticket prices for the unemployed at The Beat’s concerts (Johnson 1981). This edition also reported on The Specials headlining a benefit concert for the unemployed, at the end of a march from Liverpool to London and also that the band were lending their support to the first Youth Unemployment National Rally, along with UB40, Linton Kwesi-Johnson and Matumbi (Johnson 1981).

War was a topic covered in the following songs; ‘Man at C&A’ appears on The Specials’ second album *More Specials* and The Beat’s *Dream Home in New Zealand* are about the threat of nuclear war. Dave Wakeling remembers “we really

thought there was a chance it (Third World War) would kick off, we genuinely thought it may be coming” (Wakeling 2016).

“World War Three – nuclear attack.....atomic sounds...

I’m the man in grey, I’m just the man at C&A; And I don’t have a say in the war games they play

The mickey mouse badge told the Ayatollah at his feet; You drink your oil you schmuck, we’ll eat our heads of wheat”

By using the reference of C&A, a general mainstream clothes store with branches on most British high streets at the time, it highlights that the narrator of the song is ordinary and without a say in his future. The lyrics infer that ordinary people had no influence over going to war. The Ayatollah Khomeini had recently come to power in Iran following a revolution and was extremely anti-American and anti-British. He also clamped down on freedom in Iran, for example taking away women’s rights. A siege of the Iranian embassy in London took place in 1980 which worsened relations between Britain and Iran. Several American hostages were held after Iranian revolutionaries invaded the American embassy in Tehran. Attempts to free them failed and helped to bring about the downfall of President Carter. ‘A Dream Home in New Zealand’ appears on The Beat’s second album which is also about the threat of a nuclear war.

“It is family entertainment, play Americans and Russians, find a place to hide your poison;

Everybody’s in the bunker, everybody’s getting pushy

Beat the others round the table, be the first to the button”

The lyrics use the scenario of a game to play, to win a “dream home in New Zealand” on the other side of the world, so presumably as far away from

Europe/USA as possible. Again, like 'Man at C&A', this describes the situation of ordinary people having no say or control of their destiny, whilst a game is taking place between Americans and Russians.

The few songs that I've highlighted show how the lyrics were a reflection of many of the socio-political issues that were taking place at the time. The lyrics were of the moment, capturing the mood of the youth, like many bands in the post-punk era and referencing specific people or conflicts. Juliet De Valero Wills, manager of The Selecter, makes a good point in Rachel's book that at the time, seeing young black and white guys on stage together was like a little microcosm of what was starting to happen in society. Punk had been very white and, even though the punk bands had started to embrace black music, there was still separate reggae bands and punk bands. Whereas with Two-tone there was literally a mixing of black and white cultures and making music out of the two (Rachel 2016: 241).

The breaking down of barriers between band members and fans, both on stage and off to an extent, was particularly evident with the Two-tone bands. It was particularly impressive that members of the bands would call out people who were causing trouble, or remonstrate with bouncers and so forth. The bands were very inclusive, mixing with fans for a drink in the bar; allowing fans to travel with them on the tour bus and sleep on the hotel room floors. Roddy Byers confirmed this when I interviewed him remembering that at times he wanted a bit of privacy to "wash his socks" (Byers 2016).

My research shows that the bands' main desire at their concerts was for the audience to have a good time, dancing to the music. However, the fact that they simultaneously communicated a socio-political message, sometimes in the face of adversity, is impressive and of interest.

CONCLUSIONS

I embarked on this research to investigate connections between the political, economic and social situation in the UK/West Midlands and the music produced by the three local Two-tone bands. My research has led me to conclude that time and place played a significant role in informing the emergence of the Two-tone record label, in Coventry. The lyrics of many of the songs take issue with the social reality taking place in Britain between 1979 and 1981, and they provide a revealing snapshot of the era. The West Midlands provided a very particular set of conditions which inspired and informed the work of the Two-tone bands and as I have shown, this was clearly reflected in their music lyrics and style of performance.

A diversity of emergent genres during the late 1970s created cross-fertilization of musical styles, one of which was the fusion of punk and ska. My research shows that there was a close affiliation between the reggae and punk communities in UK cities at a number of venues where live and recorded music were featured simultaneously. A fashionable resurrection of mod culture also coincided with the emergence of Two-tone in 1979 and helped ease the transition from reggae to ska, as the first wave of mods in the 1960s had enjoyed listening to ska music.

Punk and reggae lyrics contained political subject matter so there was already a receptiveness of politically challenging music and topical lyrics became conflated with authenticity. Two-tone bands aligned themselves with political causes such as CND and Rock Against Racism and this helped to propel the groups into the political arena. Two-tone continued with political lyrics but also wanted to progress in appealing to youth being able to have a political voice, without necessarily having to be into politics. Horace Panter commented that the Two-tone groups went on Top of the Pops fully formed, with a dress code and political message, something that teenagers could relate to (Panter 2015). In many ways the lyrics of the Two-

tone songs were more profound than punk songs, they seemed to reflect everyday reality of themselves which related to many others. Two-tone also had the energy of punk rock and the rhythm of reggae so a really appealing sound.

A combination of the growth of independent labels within the punk and reggae market and the do-it-yourself ethos which was de rigueur at the time, enabled Jerry Dammers, of The Specials, to have the confidence and means to form the Two-tone label, making and distributing its first record at very little expense. The changing political climate of the time was the backdrop to the brief Two-tone phenomenon, as political and social issues that were taking place between 1979 and 1981 were particularly acute in terms of racism, unemployment and the threat of nuclear war. The advent of Two-tone music coincided with the election of Margaret Thatcher's Tory government, which brought a change of economic policy followed shortly afterwards by similar developments in the USA under Ronald Reagan.

As songwriters often take inspiration from their immediate surroundings, being based in Coventry and Birmingham, meant that the band members were right in the middle of things, geographically and with regard to changes that were happening politically. As deindustrialisation continued, in one decade Birmingham and Coventry went from a prosperous situation of almost full employment, to a situation of high unemployment and its various wider-effects. The sheer speed and ferocity with which this happened was shocking and it would have been impossible for any bands living in the West Midlands at that time not to be aware of or affected by the rapid decline of the area's prosperity. Many of the Two-tone band members had relatives that worked in the motor industry. It is clear from my research that all three bands were writing songs containing lyrics reflective of what they were observing/experiencing around them and this is where place is important, straddling both the music and political/social elements of the research. The band members were of the age where, when growing up, their aspirations would have been high, in

the boom years of the late 1950s and 1960s. Young people, especially, from the late 1950s had been regarded as an important focus for consumerism, therefore it would have come as a shock and disappointment when, during the 1970s, things were not panning out as expected. I emphasise that the Two-tone bands' lyrics were not entirely parochial, they did not necessarily want to be associated solely with the West Midlands, as there was hardly any direct references to the region in their music. What they sang about was relevant in many towns and cities across the UK.

Birmingham and Coventry clearly had a very vibrant music scene; the prominence of the motor manufacturing industry meant that there was a high number of manual/skilled manual workers on higher than average wages, so this wealthy working class undoubtedly contributed to the night-time economy. The motor manufacturing industry employed black and white people working alongside one other on assembly lines and it seems as though it was possibly more progressive with regard to equality than other places of work at the time. The generally more equal conditions in the motor industry encouraged socialising between black and white workers to take place.

The more integrated a neighbourhood was, then the more cross-fertilisation of musical absorption could take place, both black and white, allowing for a casual basis for exchange. My research found that Birmingham had instigated a dispersal policy for a while during the 1960s which involved rehousing West Indian families in various areas of the city to try to avoid heavily ghettoised communities, in particular Handsworth. This policy was short-lived, but most likely contributed to a wider spread of more racially integrated areas in middle ring and outer ring areas, like Balsall Health, Small Heath, Sparkbrook, Moseley as well as Handsworth and the inner city, than perhaps other large cities. Jones's ethnographic research in the mid-1980s of youth culture in Birmingham, shows a vibrant mix of cultures taking

place in many of the middle and outer parts of the city. Coventry was also relatively racially integrated as it was too small to have segregated suburbs. My research also shows that due to the large migration of people into Coventry during the 1960s the city had a particularly high volume of school-leaving aged youth around the late 1970s and therefore as a very youthful city, was conducive to a vibrant music scene.

My research illustrates very clearly how members of Coventry bands The Specials and The Selecter, met, and played in various configurations of reggae, soul and rock/punk bands, on the local West Midlands circuit during the 1970s, before forming the two bands in 1978/9. The close-knit circuit of a small city provided the conditions for musical links to be forged, whilst also providing the prosperity for a vibrant music scene with plenty of venues. As well as providing a platform for local bands to play the city also attracted well-known bands from other areas, although in the late 1970s it was not unusual for bands to play at smaller, less fashionable towns as part of the circuit. Furthermore Birmingham, twenty miles to the West, had the infrastructure of a very large city with a thriving nightlife where reggae and punk bands performed and this was useful to the Coventry musicians.

There was a proliferation of successful bands emerging from Birmingham during this period; Steel Pulse and UB40 were reggae bands and both wrote strongly politicized lyrics relating to political issues. Dexy's Midnight Runners, a soul band who briefly joined the Two-tone tour, came out of Birmingham in 1980. Dexys Midnight Runners and UB40 had different styles of music, but shared in common with Two-tone a strong brass sound in their early songs; UB40's 'King/Food For Thought' and Dexys Midnight Runners' 'There There My Dear' being good examples. As all these bands played with/came across the Two-tone bands, this would corroborate the suggestion that place can nurture sound. In an interview, Dave Wakeling of The Beat commented on how Dexys Midnight Runners, UB40

and The Beat would often be at the same music venues off the Bristol Road in Birmingham, before becoming successful (Wakeling 2016). This adds weight to the argument that at the time, Birmingham and Coventry provided a set of ideal conditions for a fusion of black and white music, in various forms, to emerge from the West Midlands at the end of the 1970s.

The black and white line up of The Beat, The Specials and The Selecter was unusual at that time and there had been very few other bands that could boast the same –the funk/soul bands of Hot Chocolate, KC and The Sunshine Band, Sly and the Family Stone, Darts in the 1970s and The Equals and Foundations in the 1960s are some examples. Within a couple of years of the end of Two-tone's heyday, 1981, many more British bands included a black and white line-up. Members of the Two-tone bands had commented that when they were forming and playing on the circuit locally, the mix of black and white musicians on stage together hadn't seemed to be of much interest – only when they played outside the West Midlands did it seem to be a point of interest or an issue. I would argue that this seems to add weight to there having been a more integrated music scene in the two cities than elsewhere.

Hence the combination of a large West Indian population and apparent greater integration in both cities, together with the infrastructure in place to allow for music performance and production, driven by the vision of Jerry Dammers, I would argue that Two-tone could probably only have come out of the West Midlands at that time.

It would be interesting to continue with research into the music overall that was coming out of the West Midlands during this period, especially Birmingham. Other successful bands, which were peripheral to the Two-tone phenomenon like Dexys Midnight Runners and UB40 emerged around 1980, together with other artists like

Duran Duran, Toyah Wilcox, Hazel O'Connor. It would also be interesting to explore how and if, to what extent, Two-tone has influenced bands that have gone since.

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**TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH RODDY BYERS ON 16 SEPTEMBER 2015
AT THE TWO-TONE CAFÉ, COVENTRY**

SC: What sort of music was around when you were growing up and where did you play music?

RB: My father played in soul bands in the late 1960s/1970s and my grandfather before him played in dance bands in the 1930s and 1940s so it was always kind of in my blood. I'd already started playing guitar at 13 in working men's clubs and when punk came along it allowed us to play our own music and music was back into pubs - that was just before the ska thing. Jerry asked me to play lead guitar on some of The Automatics, as the band was called at the time. You can tell from the demos that it wasn't particularly together - we used to play a mixture of live punk and reggae. It didn't really gel properly until we started to do the ska thing which started to work as it was closer to the rock and roll.

SC: Whereabouts did you grow up? Did you hear quite a lot of reggae at the time?

RB: I was brought up in a coal mining village just outside Coventry. In the mining village in the late 1960s the skinhead thing was still pretty strong. I had long hair so was a sort of punch-bag for skinheads – it was kind of unusual years later to be playing to those people.

They closed the pit down with Thatcher and all that. I heard ska and bits of reggae and stuff but to be honest it wasn't until probably Bob Marley that got me into reggae and I got a bit bored with the punk stuff – getting a bit samey after the initial first wave of punk bands like The Clash, it was a general thing there was Elvis Costello, The Clash and The Members, quite a few bands were mixing bits of reggae and New Wave and it was kind of obvious that this was the next stage. We didn't realise that bands like Madness in London and The Beat in Birmingham were doing a similar kind of thing; those bands came together independently but it became a sort of new wave of bands and The Specials broke through and opened the floodgates for those people to experiment with different forms of reggae and ska.

SC: Was the DIY aspect of punk music one of the things that attracted you?

RB: You couldn't get gigs in venues unless you played cover songs. Because of the independent labels that came about for £200 you could get a 45 record out and sell it yourself. You could get a small company like Rough Trade to manufacture a couple of thousand, which is what we did with 'Gangsters' and then that was taken up by Chrysalis....

SC: The three main bands came out of the West Midlands

RB: The Beat were already going. The Selecter, some of the guys were in reggae bands in Coventry. The Specials did Gangsters and we borrowed the money to record it but we couldn't afford to finish the B Side so Neol Davies and Brad, who later became The Specials drummer, had recorded a song called 'The Selecter' which was like a reggae/trombone instrumental. We used that as the B Side because we couldn't afford to finish what we recorded and The Selecter then formed as a proper band just after that.

SC: Do you think Coventry and Birmingham were significant in there being a black and white line-up in all three bands, as it was fairly unusual at the time?

RB: It's kind of multi-racial music scene in Coventry and Birmingham, the West Midlands in general, it didn't seem that odd to us to play in a mixed-race band. They used to say (laughing) it's amazing how you guys are black and white ... but to us it was, it's not that different really. We weren't the first guys to mix that way it's just the way it happened.... You had Ranking Roger who was a black punk - he was toasting and singing with The Beat, he'd come from the punk scene. Roland Gift who was later with Fine Young Cannibals he was in a punk band as a singer as well, The Acrylics I think they were called.

Bad Manners had a black drummer but it didn't seem quite as common down South. You always had The Equals going back to the 1960s and Eddie Grant so it wasn't that different to us really.

SC: Two-tone seemed to burst on the scene pretty quickly

RB: It was mainly because of the Two-tone record label – it started happening for us. Mostly the other musicians from the bands started picking up on us so The Pretenders and Ian Dury's band and people like that saw us and they spread the word that we were worth catching. Same with The Clash, we toured with them. So they spread the word and then the press picked up on us as a band to look out for and record companies started to come to gigs. We even had Mick Jagger turn up at a gig in London and tried to sign us to Rolling Stone Records. But Jerry (Dammers) wanted us to have our own label like a Stax, Motown kind of thing, but a Coventry version where we could sign other like-minded bands, musically and politically to make a movement. We actually got a worse (financial) deal through having the Two-tone label – we didn't get quite as much money because we'd rather have a say on signing these other young bands - that was the whole right-on thing!

SC: The deal with Chrysalis which allowed Two-tone some autonomy seemed to be mutually beneficial

RB: They were one of the few labels that actually allowed us to do that but others like CBS and other big labels didn't really want the Two-tone label as they couldn't see the point of it. Jerry was adamant that was what we were going to do. Jerry

was the mastermind behind it all; I think most of us would have just been glad to get paid but he had the foresight to see the bigger thing as a movement.

SC: What were the venues you played in Birmingham and Coventry that enabled Two-tone to flourish?

RB: It was mainly a lot of pubs who had these function rooms at the back of the building where they hired out for weddings, christenings so they were quite into having bands playing in the back room. With punk, all of a sudden, you could play these venues and all your friends would come along and it got bigger from there.

SC: The Virgin Record Shop in Coventry was also a good meeting place?

RB: That's where our drummer John Bradbury worked. Pete Waterman had an upstairs part of the shop, Soul Hole I think it was called. It was a meeting place in the days where you could go in a record shop and they had headphones and booths, listen to music and spend the whole afternoon there without spending a penny!

SC: Did you play in Birmingham much?

RB: We had a residency at a place called The Golden Eagle, they knocked that down a few years ago. We played there once a week for a couple of months. I remember it was an old Victorian pub with a winding staircase over three floors where we'd have to carry all the gear - that sticks in my memory. It was an in place to go so there was that cross-over thing. There was always a bit of rivalry between Birmingham and Coventry musically and with football as well - sometimes there would be a little bit of trouble but not too much at that particular time.

SC: Did you hear the recent Too Much Fighting on the Dancefloor documentary?

RB: Trouble on the football terraces kind of transferred over to the music scene so you had gangs of lads coming to concerts and they'd start chanting their football team and another gang of lads from another part of town or another town chanting their team which would sometimes would start trouble. In the later days the National Front started targeting groups of men to join their organisation.

SC: Which brings me on to Rock Against Racism

RB: We did a number of shows for them. At the time it does seem a lot of people were more politically motivated than they are today. Music and politics were linked mainly because of Margaret Thatcher coming to power, we all hated her.

SC: I read that Two-tone wanted to perform music mainly for people to dance to

RB: Yes where we changed from the punk/reggae to ska, it was more music to dance to, people hadn't really danced for years and all of a sudden people would go and see a band and dance all night, it was nice.

SC: Did the lyrics become more political over the two years?

RB: Well we just wrote about what we knew, what we saw so I don't think we sat down and thought we'd write a political song, it was more about what you and your friends were going through. If your black mates were getting beaten up by the National Front, that would be part of what you'd write about. But then again you could be a punk rocker and get targeted for being different; probably the same today - where if you look a bit different someone's going to have a go at you sometimes.

SC: Were you surprised by the reaction to 'Ghost Town'?

RB: It wasn't intentional! One of those kind of things, Jerry had written it, we'd all noticed how the country was getting run down. There was a bit of trouble in Coventry not quite to the degree of Liverpool and some other major cities but there was the Sus laws where black people were getting stopped and searched by the Police and targeted by the Police and you got National Front doing marches protected by the Police and then police were searching black people and a bit of a pressure really. It was kind of strange how 'Ghost Town' came out just as the riots were kicking off. In fact in America when they were showing the riots taking place in England, they were using 'Ghost Town' as the soundtrack to it – crazy! (Laughs) although they had enough problems of their own in America.

SC: Did any of you, your band mates and from the other bands as well, know many people affected by the decline of the car industry?

RB: Well Coventry was like a mini-Detroit in the 1960s. My father worked at Jaguar cars and both my brothers did. For a period of time in the 1960s everyone had plenty of money but when the factories started closing down there was a lot more unemployed, a lot more unrest. I think it tends to go hand in hand sometimes – you don't write those kind of songs if it's going good. But it did seem, jumping ahead, when the New Romantic thing came just after Two-tone, it's as if the business decided that (laughs) enough's enough, let's get rid of all these left-wingers, get the pretty boys in again, don't give a damn just want to get dressed up and party!

SC: There was a big American tour – Horace Panter wrote a lot about it in his autobiography.

RB: Basically once the band started taking off after ‘Gangsters’ we didn’t stop working at all, we were on tour all the time. We’d just done a big European tour then were over to America, it was like starting again because they didn’t really understand punk rock, let alone ska music. We did a few dates supporting The Police, who were a bit more rock-orientated or something more commercial – what we were doing was a bit more political so record companies and people over there weren’t exactly in favour of people they would term to be Communists – though we weren’t that far left! Jerry Dammers did an interview with the *LA Times* I think and, when asked if he was having fun in America, replied that he’d had more fun on a trip to Russia with the school!, which is Jerry’s way of having a dig. That didn’t really endear us – I’m not sure if it’s true but I’d heard that the American branch of Chrysalis stopped pushing the record because they didn’t like the message we were putting out.

SC: All sorts of British bands who have been to America, starting with The Beatles, have caused a reaction

RB: Yes, I’ve always found it strange how some bands have worked there and some don’t. It’s like what they say about The Velvet Underground and The Ramones, bands like that inspired all these other bands to form. It was the same with The Specials over there, like No Doubt and Mighty Mighty Bosstones and all these others like Operation Ivy - ska/punk bands, who saw us, probably on *Saturday Night Live* and were probably young at the time. All of a sudden there’s this huge ska movement in the States about 8 or 9 years later than we played there so we must have had some effect on the Americans.

SC: While you were in New York, did you meet some of the New-Wave bands like Talking Heads, Blondie?

RB: Debbie Harry introduced us because she was on the same record label, Chrysalis, when we played Long Island. They were pretty much into what we were doing. I heard a rumour that Debbie wanted The Specials to back her on (the ska song) ‘The Tide Is High’, although that might be heresay.