

U n d e r s t a n d i n g

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# American Pie VIII

An American Experience



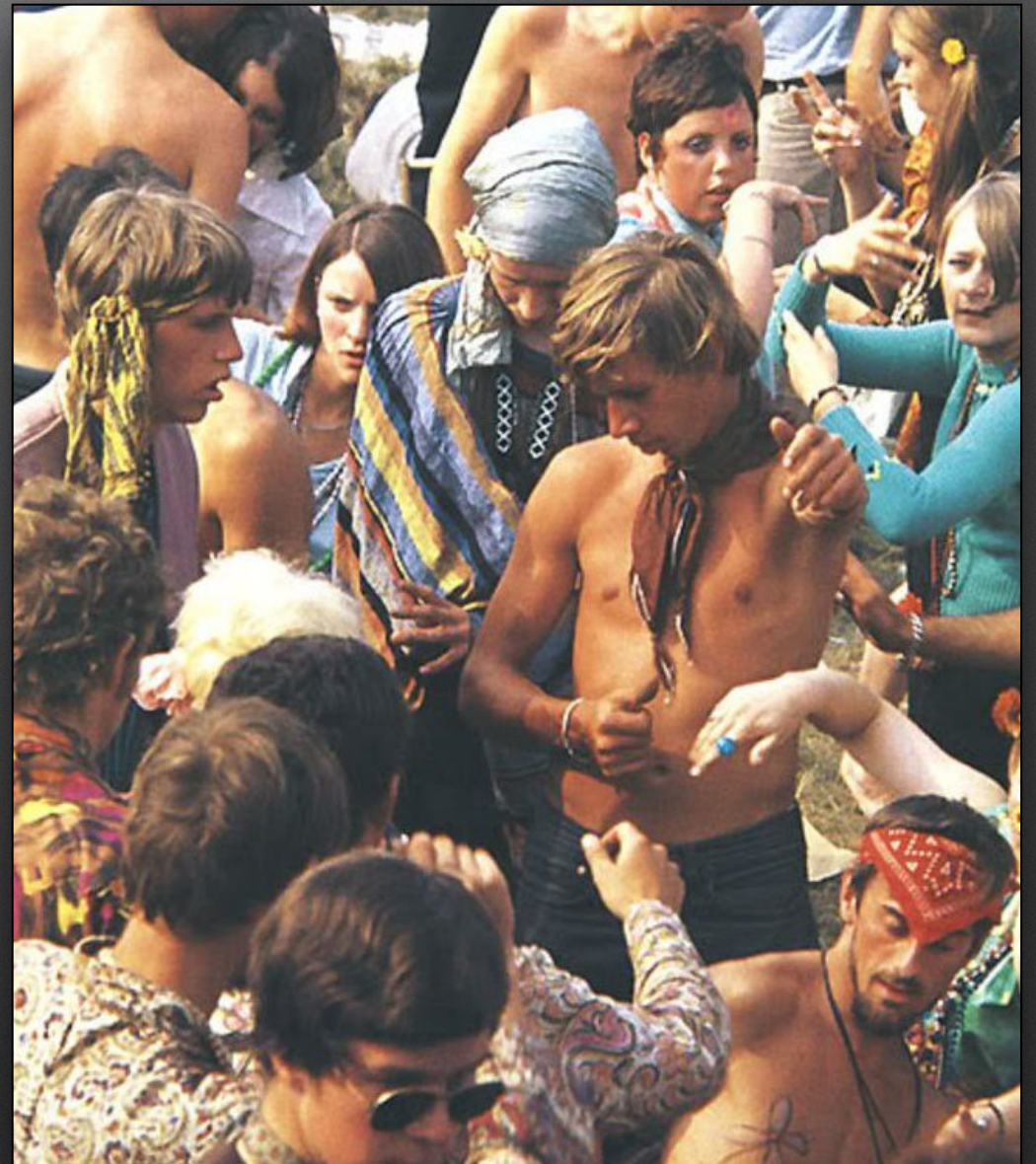
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## Conclusion

As American culture was transformed through the decade of the 1960s, the popular entertainment of the day registered these changes, just as it always has.

But more than any other idiom, rock 'n' roll was its most accurate barometer: from the early social outrage of *Bob Dylan*, *The Beatles'* contagious *countercultural idealism*, or the *fierce nihilism* of the late sixties *Rolling Stones*, rock 'n' roll defined the generation coming of age in these turbulent years, giving it voice and charting its course as no other popular art form did.

It was the perfect metaphor for these changes, and McLean found in it a way to describe the dislocating sense of loss we were feeling - to enduring effect.





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## Meaning Of American Pie

Regarding the meaning of *American Pie*, the songwriter has remained characteristically silent, with a few exceptions - especially this one, giving some indication of his intentions:

*"That song didn't just happen," said Don. "It grew out of my experiences.*

*American Pie* was part of my process of self-awakening; a mystical trip into my past. Don called his song a complicated parable, open to different interpretations. *"People ask me if I left the lyrics open to ambiguity. Of course I did. I wanted to make a whole series of complex statements. The lyrics had to do with the state of society at the time."*





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## The Death Of America

In the late sixties and early seventies, Don was obsessed with what he called *"the death of America"* - the loss of many things he believed in while growing up. *"In a sense, 'American Pie' was a very despairing song. In another, though, it was very hopeful. Pete Seeger told me he saw it as a song in which people were saying something. They'd been fooled, they'd been hurt, and it wasn't going to happen again. That's a good way to look at it - a hopeful way."*



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## The Meaning Is Evident

In identifying its frequently overlooked theme of America's lost innocence, the meaning of *American Pie* becomes more evident, as its cast of characters are better placed in their historical and cultural context.

Still, portions of the song remain *cryptic*, and as the songwriter readily admits, deliberately so: like any good poem, keeping the language suspended imparts a dreamlike quality to it...

...allowing the lyrics to resonate deeper in the listener than a more literal approach would.

But it is also this ambiguity that has generated so much debate, and that has kept *American Pie* on the pop culture map these many years.





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