

British-American Relations

Imitation is the biggest form of flattery and early American imitation of British culture, and the gradual reversal of the process to a more independent relationship, also manifested itself in popular culture. After independence Americans continued to import British sports and games, and then transforming them into their own -- for example, turning rugby into football and four cats into baseball (supposedly). British popular music maintained its airwaves dominance, as did British theater, particularly evident in the many performances of Shakespeare's plays. The circus was another nineteenth-century British import that enjoyed enormous popularity in America.

By the mid nineteenth century, American inventions such as minstrel shows and, after the Civil War, wild west shows gained a foothold across the pond. These entertainments paved the way for the popularity after World War I of American popular music -- jazz and the blues -- and of course, American motion pictures. American influence in areas of mass popular entertainment increased after World War II and led some observers, who also noted the influx of many features of American consumerism -- such as fast food, supermarkets, and household appliances -- to comment, on the "Americanization" of Britain.

In the 1950s, American rock and roll music was imitated by British groups, who then refined it and, in the view of some, improved it. In the 1960s, they exported their version to the United States with such success that American embarked on the "British invasion," led by groups like the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. Along with the music came British fashions, such as the miniskirt, longer hairstyles for men, and the "Twiggy" look.

At the end of the twentieth century, British performers continued to be very involved on the American stage and screen. As well, British programs are hits on American public television. American interest in British celebrities, including the Royal Family, remains high. Meanwhile, most British towns have McDonald's, Pizza Huts, and Starbucks as well as American-style traffic jams. Mutual imitation and innovation, most conspicuously in music, continues at a dizzying pace.