

# **The Effect of the Beatles on Society**

Written by: Larry Coffey  
Date: 26 March 1981

## **The Effect of the Beatles on Society**

In June of 1956, John Lennon met Paul McCartney for the first time. Nobody ever dreamed that John and Paul would have the success that they had. John Lennon and Paul McCartney along with George Harrison and Richard Starkey (Ringo Starr) became known as the greatest and the most influential rock musicians in the world. The Beatles, whose music has been played by prestigious symphonies around the world and has been sung by renowned singers such as Frank Sinatra and Tony Bennett, were a vibrant moving force of the 1960's; they permanently changed the course of music and soundly influenced the lives of future generations.

To get an idea of how much the Beatles helped shape the following generations' lifestyles, one must look at the lifestyle and the music before the Beatles. The music the Beatles played, "Rock and Roll," had already established itself as a popular form of music to American teenagers. Derived from the black's "Rhythm and Blues," rock and roll was made popular by performers such as Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley, and Bill Haley. Though rock and roll had been around for about ten years before the Beatles became famous, it was still a relatively new form of music that had plenty of potential. The Beatles were elevated from obscurity by utilizing the music's potential.

The lifestyle of the fifties was slowly changing. The American public was beginning to accept the possibility of a "working class hero". Films such as "Saturday Night and Sunday Morning" and "The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner," which portrayed working class protagonists, became overnight successes. The Beatles, who were definitely working class, were the ultimate rags to riches story. As the fifties drew to a close, the Beatles were on a path that forever changed history.<sup>1</sup>

The Beatles' success was not immediate. In 1960 the Beatles, who consisted of John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, Stuart Sutcliffe (guitarist), and Pete Best (drummer), made their first trip to Hamburg, Germany. Although the trip wasn't a

success, the second trip to Hamburg as a backing group to Tony Sheridan was more successful. The Beatles returned home in June of 1961 and found that more and more people would come to see their performances. Though popular and drawing large audiences, the Beatles were refused by Decca, Pye, Columbia, HMV, and EMI, all prominent recording companies.<sup>2</sup>

The emergence of the Beatles' popularity can be traced to the help of two people: the determination of Brian Epstein, their manager, and the foresight of George Martin, their producer. Brian Epstein, a record store owner, was a novice at the manager business. Through his raw determination, he was able to meet up with George Martin. George knew the record business, and he pulled some strings to let the Beatles record. Their first release, "Love Me Do," only reached the number seventeen position on the charts; however, that was the start of an illustrious career for John, Paul, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr, who replaced Pete Best as drummer in August of 1962.<sup>3</sup>

Beatlemania was the term that described the hysteria resulting from the Beatles' rise. The Beatles were breaking attendance records all over Europe. Following every performance were reports of girls that had become injured in their attempts just to see the boys. By the end of 1963, the Beatles had five songs that had reached number one in Britain. Looking for new directions to expand, the Beatles looked across the ocean to America.

When the Beatles touched down in New York in February 1964, they knew they had come to the right place as ten thousand screaming fans fought to see them.<sup>4</sup> During the Beatles stay in Manhattan, at least a dozen girls were injured trying to catch sight of the boys.<sup>5</sup> During their concerts, there was so much noise that the audience drowned out the performers. Any movement by an individual Beatle would cause added screaming by rows and rows of young females. This kind of reaction would plague the group at any performance they did.<sup>6</sup>

The Beatles popularity became the point of many debates. At one point in August 1966, John claimed that the Beatles were even more popular than Jesus.<sup>7</sup> Though he apologized for it later, he was correct in analyzing their popularity. It seemed as if anything the Beatles said or did would affect the whole society.

One major effect that they had on society was the drug influence of their music. Taking drugs became the “in” thing to do. The press went into an uproar when they found out the initials to the Beatles’ “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds” was LSD, a popular but addicting drug.<sup>8</sup> Another song, “Day in the Life,” was banned by the BBC and some United States radio stations because of alleged drug allusions.<sup>9</sup> Drugs were becoming a way of life for many teenagers.

In late 1966, the Beatles decided that they would do no more concerts. Many thought that this would lead to a drop in their popularity. The media was soon proved wrong when their next album, “Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band,” became an instant hit. Anything the Beatles touched turned to gold. John Lennon’s first book, In His Own Write, was a million seller.<sup>10</sup> The Beatles could do nothing that wouldn’t sell.

As time went on, however, the Beatles began to pursue their own individual tastes. When Brian Epstein committed suicide in August of 1967, the Beatles began their long decline. The Beatles began to rot from within. The TV film, “Magical Mystery Tour,” was a complete failure. George Harrison took studying in India very seriously. John’s marriage to Cynthia broke down, and he began to see Yoko Ono. All four started to do musical work without the other three. They were having serious financial trouble with their own recording company, Apple Records. By 1969, the Beatles were in deep trouble.

It came as only a mild surprise to most people when Paul McCartney decided to quit the group in April of 1970. Paul claimed personal differences existed with John and with Allen Klein, their financial advisor. Though at first the split was claimed as temporary, the world began to understand that the Beatles would never exist anymore. When

asked just what he was going to do now that he was breaking from the group, he replied: "My only plan is to grow up."<sup>11</sup>

By 1970 though, the Beatles had already made a huge impact on society. A revolutionary group responsible for bombing three business buildings called themselves "Revolutionary Force 9" which was derived from "Revolution Number 9," an eight-minute collage of noises from the Beatles' White Album.<sup>12</sup> Another influence was in the youth churches where a yellow submarine was made a symbol of love. The yellow submarine, from a movie and a song of that name, was described as a 'a place where they loved each other in a groovy way and got strength to do battle with the Blue Meanies. It also shows that a church has to have flexibility and maneuverability.'<sup>13</sup> Though the Beatles were gone, their influence remained.

The Beatles have influenced people in ways never dreamed of. Their music was even blamed for the Charles Manson murders in Southern California. Their style of music changed the way the music industry had worked; most groups now perform their own original material, which was very uncommon in the late fifties and early sixties. The Beatles' constant preaching of love has changed a whole generation's thinking, and may have helped to bring an end to the Vietnam War. Their drug taking and radical approach to life has caused some people to take the Beatles' philosophy wrongly and to think that some terrorist activity was acceptable. Others have taken what the Beatles said as gospel and formed new religions. However people reacted to the Beatles didn't matter; it was just significant that people were reacting, and therefore were being influenced in some manner by the Beatles. The Beatles, the greatest rock band ever to exist, does not record as a group anymore, but their influences will continue for years as the youth of each generation listens to the music that changed the world.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Pascall, ed., Story of Rock: The Beatles (New York: Phoebus Publishing Co. / BPC Publishing Ltd., 1973-76), p16.

<sup>2</sup> Pascall, p6.

<sup>3</sup> “Four Beatles and How They Grew,” New York Times, 17 February 1964, p20.

<sup>4</sup> Pascall, p19.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Alden, “Wild Eyed Mobs Pursue Beatles” New York Times, 13 February 1964, p26.

<sup>6</sup> John S. Wilson, “2,900-Voice Chorus Joins the Beatles,” New York Times, 13 February 1964, p26.

<sup>7</sup> “Lennon of Beatles Sorry for Making Remark on Jesus,” New York Times, 12 August 1966, p36.

<sup>8</sup> Pascall, p29.

<sup>9</sup> Pascall, p10.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Schickele, “About the Awful,” Nation, 8 June 1964, p588.

<sup>11</sup> Alvin Shuster, “McCartney Breaks Off With Beatles,” New York Times, 11 April 1970, p21.

<sup>12</sup> “Revolutionary Force 9 Recalls Beatles Song,” New York Times, 13 March 1970, p26.

<sup>13</sup> Edward B. Fiske, “Yellow Submarine Is Symbol of Youth Churches,” New York Times, 20 April 1970, p23.

## Bibliography

- Alden, Robert. "Wild-Eyed Mobs Pursue Beatles."  
New York Times, 13 February 1964, p26.
- Fiske, Edward B. "Yellow Submarine Is Symbol of Youth Churches."  
New York Times, 20 April 1970, p23.
- "Four Beatles and How They Grew."  
New York Times, 17 February 1964, pp1 and 20.
- "Lennon of Beatles Sorry for Making Remark on Jesus."  
New York Times, 12 August 1966, p36.
- Pascall, Jeremy, ed. Story of Rock: The Beatles.  
New York: Phoebus Publishing Co. / BPC Publishing Ltd. 1973-76,  
pp6, 10, 16, 19, and 29.
- "Revolutionary Force 9 Recalls Beatles' Song."  
New York Times, 13 March 1970, p26.
- Rinzler, Alan. "No Soul in Beatlesville."  
Nation, 2 March 1964, pp221-2.
- Schickle, Peter. "About the Awful."  
Nation, 8 June 1964, pp588-9.
- Shuster, Alvin. "McCartney Breaks Off With Beatles."  
New York Times, 11, April 1970, p21.
- Wilson, John S. "2,900-Voice Chorus Joins the Beatles."  
New York Times, 13 February 1964, p26.