

How the beatles changed a generation

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Ali Greer Research Paper HST 367 How One Band Changed a Generation The 1960's is a decade remembered for its counterculture, social revolution and an emergence of a new kind of popular culture. If you asked me what my first thoughts were when I hear the decade 1960s, I automatically think about the Beatles. Has a decade ever had such a defining musical group that represents not only a shift to more rebellious music such as Rock n Roll, but an influence so great that they are still talked about to this day?

The Beatles not only changed music but they affected culture in ways that had not been challenged by a musical group before. I asked my mom what she remembers about the Beatles. She was only 6 when they performed on the Ed Sullivan Show but she still remembers. She said that, "The Beatles didn't define a generation, they created one". The first way that the Beatles challenged everyday popular culture was that the fact that they were British. Before the Beatles traveled across "the pond", the U. S. had been a tough break for aspiring British pop groups.

The Beatles wanted to teach the world that pop music could be intelligent and that British groups could do that just as well as American music groups. Some could argue that the Beatles did not start a phenomenon, they somehow perfected the cultural significance of 1950's musicians before them like Buddy Holly and Elvis Presley. Before settling with their signature rock sound, The Beatles started in the Skiffle genre, a type of music with jazz, blues and roots influences. By 1960, Lennon wanted to move away from Skiffle to more of a Rock n Roll sound.

Lennon and McCartney perfected their writing skills and relied less and less on outside material. This was a groundbreaking ideal in the music

industry and it had a lasting impact on culture. It urged other big name music acts such as the Rolling Stones to start writing their own music. Lennon and McCartney would eventually become one of the most famous songwriting partnerships in music history. The Beatles first appeared on American television on February 9, 1964 on The Ed Sullivan Show. 40 % of the country, about 73 million viewers tuned in to see Paul, John, George and Ringo perform for the first time in America.

This is still considered one of the most important moments in television history. Now one may ask, how did so many people know about this little band from Britain? The record I Want to Hold Your Hand was leaked in advance to American radio stations. The record label could not prevent DJs from the playing the record therefore the album was officially released on December 26, 1963. 250, 000 copies were sold in the first three days of its release. It's unclear who actually leaked the record beforehand, but this publicity stunt was hugely successful for the Beatles.

Mobs of people were waiting for the Beatles when they arrived at JFK airport. When asked how did you find America, Ringo Starr jokingly said " Turn left at Greenland. " The media took to covering this frenzy as best as it could. Newsweek printed an article on February 24 , 1963 reviewing the Beatles' performance on The Ed Sullivan Show. The last paragraph ended with this, " the odds are they will fade away, as most adults confidently predict. " No one could predict the upcoming effects that the Beatles would have on American culture. The Beatles had arrived in America during a confusing time.

President Kennedy had been assassinated just a few months prior, the threat of a war in Vietnam was eminent and Americans needed something new. And the Beatles were just what they needed. They rejuvenated pop music for Americans. They were seen as modern and sleek. “ Beatlemania was so strong because the times and the youth of America were simpler and more naive. ” This simplicity of society would play a big role in the Beatles influence on culture because it would allow them to change their style so freely without doubt from the nation.

Society would accept it as popular no matter what. When the Beatles arrived in America, parents of teenagers hated them. They hated their relationship themed lyrics, their sex appeal, etc. The Beatles influenced a generation to not do what their parents told them to and helped Rock n Roll gain its rebellious reputation. Naturally, The Beatles are best known for their music. Not only did they have a large number of hit songs, but their music also evolved very rapidly through the group's brief career, embarking on territory not previously explored by pop music groups.

Released in 1967, " Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" was a huge breakthrough album in pop music with its use of orchestras, harpsichords, circus sounds and other effects that were largely created in the studio. No longer did pop groups just have to be guitars, a bass, drums and vocals -- nor were they limited to what could be performed live. The Beatles still influence music years after their breakup. “ Beatlesque” is “ a term used by critics to describe music that has one or more traits or characteristics of the music made by the Beatles. There are also hundreds of Beatles tribute bands out there paying tribute to the Fab 4. “ The Beatles sold a lot of records not

because they were the greatest musicians but simply because their music was easy to sell to the masses: it had no difficult content, it had no technical innovations, it had no creative depth. They wrote a bunch of catchy 3-minute ditties and they were photogenic". The Beatles were immensely popular during the 1960s and they helped feminize a culture. The baby boom began in 1946 and ended in 1964 which meant that 75% of the nation's population was in the teen or pre teen bracket. When the Beatles appeared on The Ed Sullivan Show, hundreds of teenage girls were lined up, screaming. An important factor to Beatlemania was the fans. There was something slightly feminine about the Beatles. Their slightly tousled hair, their tailored suits. The Beatles had the perfect mix between masculinity and femininity. The Beatles persistent feature of women and love in their songs left teenage girls swooning and a culture that was more sexually driven than ever.

As Steven Stark points out in his book Meet The Beatles, they also "challenged the definition that existed during their time of what it meant to be a man. " " The Beatles were not only selling records, they were selling trends. " Featured in the Time All Time 100 Fashion Icons, the Beatles were always evolving when it came to style. You could say that it's normal for musicians to change their appearance to keep up with society and the latest trends. The Beatles were the trend. Whatever they did, society copied. When the Beatles first traveled to America, they wore black collarless suits.

They even popularized a haircut called the " moptop" The moptop was a straight cut, collar length in the back and over the ears on the sides. The public went crazy for this cut. McCartney writes in a letter, " George explained in a 60s interview that it was John and I having our hair cut in Paris

which prompted him to do the same.... We were the first to take the plunge. " The Beatles were not afraid of taking risks. They took what they liked from popular culture and took it to a new extreme. Towards the end of Beatlemania, the Beatles embraced more of a psychedelic style, with bright patterns and colors.

They even let their signature hairstyles grow out and even experimented with facial hair. John Lennon even established his own trend, wearing tea shade glasses which ended up being called " Lennon" glasses. The Beatles were not hesitant when it came to change, even when it dealt with changing their own fads and this is important to their success as culture icons. The Beatles did not merely stay in the music industry. They dabbled in the movie business too. Their film, Yellow Submarine was a colorful trendsetter in the world of animation. Producers used techniques that had never been used before.

Although Yellow Submarine was produced on a small budget, the film was met with mostly positive reviews. Talking about the film, Time Magazine stated that it, " turned into a smash hit, delighting adolescents and esthetes alike". The aftermath of Yellow Submarine was that animation was being taken as a more serious form of art. Previously, animation had been described as silly or goofy. The Beatles changed this perspective. Josh Weinstein, a former writer for the animated series The Simpsons wrote an article describing how Yellow Submarine affected modern animation today.

Weinstein states, " Without Yellow Submarine there would never have been The Simpsons, no Futurama, no South Park, no Toy Story, no Shrek No animated anything that enables us to laugh at ourselves while being highly

entertained. " As you can see, The Beatles accomplishments in popular culture are still talked about today. The religious allure of the Beatles was a vital factor in allowing the group to endure. John Lennon was onto something in 1966 when he compared the group's popularity with that of Jesus Christ.

Multitudes flocked to them and even brought sick children to see if the Beatles could somehow heal them. Thus, those who have seen elements of religious ecstasy in Beatlemania are not wrong. " Religion, it must not be forgotten, has its roots in spiritual bonding. And the Beatles had a powerful appeal to a generation in calling forth a spiritual bonding. It was so intoxicating that it created mass hysteria. In this way, the Beatles—especially with their elevation to a kind of sainthood—have become modern counterparts to the religious figures of the past".

John Lennon once stated that, " The Beatles are more popular than Jesus" and this remark caused quite the controversy in the United States. It led to fans to protest the band and to burn their albums. This was different than the attitudes of society during Beatlemania. Society was actually challenging something the Beatles did. This was a momentous event because it showed that the Beatles were immune. They made mistakes too. They didn't have a perfect image. But that lack of perfect image was the catalyst to the Beatles success. Society saw the Beatles as four men trying to change the face of music. The Beatles did not only influence religion, but political views as well. Lennon in an interview to Rolling Stone talks about the song " Revolution", " I had been thinking about it up in the hills in India. I still had this 'God will save us' feeling about it, that it's going to be all right (even now I'm saying 'Hold on, John, it's going to be all right,' otherwise, I won't hold on) but that's

why I did it, I wanted to talk, I wanted to say my piece about revolution. I wanted to tell you, or whoever listens, to communicate, to say 'What do you say? This is what I say. " Revolution was the Beatles first overtly public political song. Revolution dealt with the War in Vietnam. New Left publications called the song a “ betrayal”. Besides its blatant political undertones, Revolution went on to become a hit single. The Beatles were and still are so successful because of their infiltration of different media outlets. Music, television, movies, magazines, radio, etc. They knew that they needed not only to sell music but to sell a legacy. The Beatles influenced a whole generation during the 1960s and they are still influencing new generations to this day.

This multi decade success is a clear example of their powerful grasp on American culture during the 1960s. Bibliography <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2012/nov/19/beatles-yellow-submarine-simpsons-shrek> <http://www.edsullivan.com/artists/the-beatles/> <http://www.beatles-tribute-band-uk.co.uk/history.htm> http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2110513_2110627_2110708,00.html <http://www.scaruffi.com/vol1/beatles.html#sgt> <http://beatle.wordpress.com/2008/08/23/history-the-beatles-started-a-revolution-that-changed-us-all-forever/> <http://www.thebeatles.com/>