

# John Lennon and the War for Peace

Nicole Ashby

Senior Division

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John Lennon has made waves in the world of music, the movement for peace, and pop culture as a whole. Through the Beatles, he became one of the most famous people in the world and used his position to fight for peace. Despite the many tragedies he experienced throughout his life, John Lennon fought to change the world and triumphed in doing so.

John Winston Lennon was born on October 9, 1940 in Liverpool, England to Alfred and Julia Lennon. Alfred was not there when his son was born but supported John and his mother until he was four years old. John's aunt Mimi and uncle George took him in when he was five years old after Mimi reported his parents to social services (Aitken). John would not see his father again for twenty five years, but he would see his mother regularly. Mimi and George raised John as their own and Julia would visit their home often, but this did not suppress the feeling of isolation and abandonment John felt after both of his parents had deserted him (Nowyer).

As a child and teenager, Lennon showed that he was a rebel and a troublemaker. He said, "I was the one who all the other boys' parents ... would say, 'Keep away from him' ... The parents instinctively recognized that I was a troublemaker, meaning that I did not conform and I would influence their children, which I did" (Aitken). John's rebellious behavior would land him in trouble many times throughout his life. He also loved to draw and play music, things that were not encouraged by his school or his aunt. In fact, he received many notices from his school that said he was "certainly on the road to failure" (Aitken). However, Julia did as much as she could to help John pursue his love of music. She would teach him songs by Elvis on the banjo, piano, and guitar. She gave Lennon his first guitar when he was a teenager even though she knew Mimi would not approve and encouraged him to play. With his mother's encouragement, John formed his first band, The Quarrymen. Through this group, Lennon would meet his future writing partner and life-long friend Paul McCartney (Aitken).

When Lennon was seventeen years old, his mother was killed in a tragic car accident while crossing the street on her way home from Mimi's. This event caused Lennon huge amounts of pain and influenced many of the songs he wrote in the future (Aitken).

After high school, Lennon attended the Liverpool College of Art, but was kicked out after failing his final exam. While he was there, he met his first wife Cynthia Powell. John and Cynthia were married in 1962 after Cynthia found out she was pregnant. The two kept their marriage secret as long as possible. Julian Lennon, John's first son and only child with Cynthia, was born in April of 1963. The two were married until 1968 when Powell found Lennon having an affair with Japanese artist Yoko Ono. He would marry Ono after he and Powell divorced (Aitken)

John also met Stuart Sutcliffe at the Liverpool College of Art. Sutcliffe was an artist, but played bass for the Beatles when they played in Hamburg, Germany. He played with the group in Hamburg for a while, but decided to leave and resume studying art in Germany. This left only four men in the group: John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr. The four spent two and a half years in Hamburg playing whatever gigs they could find. They played in clubs, bars, and any other place they could. They would often play for hours on end with barely any break in between. This led to their first experiences with drugs. The band members would take pills in order to stay awake. Their time in Hamburg also helped the Beatles to gain popularity and find their manager Brian Epstein (Aitken).

In 1963, the Beatles released their first album Please Please Me which kicked off the cultural phenomenon known as Beatlemania. Beatlemania swept across the United States and the Beatles toured right behind it. People loved the Beatles, and the Beatles felt lucky to be able to do something they loved. Paul McCartney said "John and I wrote that in a hotel room, on twin beds during an afternoon off ... Here I am talking about an afternoon off, and we're sitting there writing! We just loved it so

much. It wasn't work."<sup>1</sup> They toured until 1966 after deciding it was not worth performing because they could not be heard over the screaming crowds. During those years the Beatles would release *Please Please Me*, *A Hard Day's Night*, *Help!*, *Rubber Soul*, and many singles. They would also release a few movies to promote the albums (Aitken)

The Beatles also kicked off what was known as the British Invasion. The British Invasion was a period in the 1960's when British artists began dominating the musical charts and touring in America. This brought hundreds of new artists - groups like The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Animals, and The Who - to America and changed music as a whole. These groups brought new styles of music to America, such as new forms of rock, skiffle, and blues. This cultural phenomenon drastically changed the music scene, and would influence the music industry as a whole. The British Invasion was lead by The Beatles. The group was the first British band to tour America and the first to play to full stadiums. The Beatles changed the game when it came to music and touring (Puterbaugh). The book *The Sun, The Moon, and the Rolling Stones* talks about how The Beatles changed music. It talks about how The Rolling Stones and many other bands at the time had been trying to achieve a certain sound in their music. When they first heard The Beatles' song "Love Me Do" on the radio, their hearts sank. Keith Richards said "they've beaten us to it." The Beatles were the first to get the sound they all wanted. It later talks about the competition between British Invasion bands and how they all felt that they needed to make a record equal to The Beatles' (Cohen).

It was in 1966 that Lennon began to receive controversy for a comment he made in an interview. American religious groups were extremely upset when Lennon said:

Christianity will go. It will vanish and shrink. I needn't argue about that; I'm right and will be proved right. We're more popular than Jesus now; I don't know which will go

first, rock 'n' roll or Christianity. Jesus was alright but his disciples were thick and ordinary. It's them twisting it that ruins it for me (Aitken).

This caused major backlash at the whole group, especially Lennon. It even played into his eventual murder. Lennon later issued a formal apology, but many people were not willing to forget about this comment, and it cost him greatly in the end (Aitken).

The Beatles continued making music until 1970 with the release of *Let It Be* and their final performance on the rooftop of the Apple Building. In these years, the Beatles experimented with many different styles and concepts in their music. They experimented with concept albums, orchestral background music, and other things that had never been done in rock 'n' roll music. Lennon especially experimented with more psychedelic sounding music. This is likely due to the fact that the band members were all experimenting with drugs at this time and Lennon's overall artistic style. They released five more albums, *Revolver*, *Magical Mystery Tour*, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, *Abbey Road*, and *Let It Be*, as well as many singles and a few more movies (Aitken). Lennon was also in a movie about World War II called *How I Won The War*. The movie told the story of a group of young men in the war and followed their lives. It was his only non-musical role.

The band broke up after releasing *Let It Be* in 1970 after tension had risen between the band members. Each Beatle had their reasons for leaving the band, but Lennon had the most unique reason. He wanted to be with his wife Yoko Ono. John wanted to have Yoko by his side everywhere he went, and the band did not agree with that. This greatly contributed to his leaving the band. It also caused fans to blame Ono for breaking up the band. This is not entirely true, but she may have contributed. Lennon and Ono were widely recognized because of the freedom they took with their art and their fight for peace. The two had a son, Sean Lennon, and John took some time off from music to care for him (Aitken).

After the Beatles, Lennon made his own music and used his fame to advocate for peace. He is known to have opposed war and to have protested the Vietnam War specifically. He did triumph in getting his point across. Even before the Beatles broke up, Lennon sent a message of love with the song All You Need Is Love on Magical Mystery Tour. Lennon explained the song by saying this:

I think if you get down to the basics, whatever the problem is, it's usually to do with love. So I think 'All You Need Is Love' is a true statement ... It doesn't mean that all you have to do is put on a phoney smile or wear a flower dress and it's gonna be alright. Love is not just something that you stick on posters or stick on the back of your car, or on the back of your jacket or on a badge. I'm talking about real love, so I still believe that. Love is appreciation of other people and allowing them to be. Love is allowing someone to be themselves and that's what we do need (Aitken).

Lennon preached this message of love for the rest of his life. He very clearly opposed the Vietnam War and spoke out against violence. He did this in his song Imagine where he painted the picture of a utopian world.<sup>2</sup> He also preached this in the 'Bed Peace' and 'Hair Peace' campaign that he and Yoko Ono created. The couple stayed in bed for a week and let people interview them about their ideas on varying subjects. The whole thing was to advocate for peace, and they did just that. Lennon also participated in many peace marches after he moved to New York with Yoko (Davies).

On December 8, 1980, at 11:07pm, John Lennon was pronounced dead at Roosevelt's Hospital in New York City. At approximately 10:50pm, Lennon was shot four times by Mark David Chapman outside of his apartment. Lennon was rushed to the hospital, but there was nothing they could do. He had lost eighty percent of his blood and many important blood vessels near his heart had been destroyed. Many people in the hospital could hardly believe that John Lennon was really dead (Aitkens)

Lennon's death caused grief to spread throughout the world. John Lennon, an advocate for peace and living legend, had been shot and killed. It was a tragedy. People all over the world mourned Lennon's death. People in New York City lit candles and put tokens where he had been killed. All over the world there are monuments to John Lennon. He left a legacy, even if his life was tragic (Aitkens).

John Lennon advocated for peace and had a huge influence on the world of music today. He triumphed over his own insecurities as well as the doubts of others and became one of the most famous people to ever live. Lennon brought people's attention to the importance of peace and made a huge difference in how the world is today. The world is still filled with hatred, there is nothing that can change that, but John Lennon showed that just how beautiful the world could be if people would give peace a chance.

## Annotated Bibliography

### Primary Sources

Lennon, John, et al. *The Lennon Play: In His Own Write*. Simon and Schuster, 1969.

This book was completely and totally Lennon (except the one part that was co-written with McCartney) and showed just how deep he could be, but also how silly he could be. It showed the two sides of John's personality that many people do not even know exist.

Lennon, John, and Hunter Davies. *The John Lennon Letters*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2016.

This book showed who John Lennon really was. His letters show what his personality really was and not how he is often portrayed.

### Secondary Sources

Aitken, Kim. *The Beatles: All You Ever Wanted to Know about the Fab Four*. Igloo Books, 2017.

This source helped me to really understand John Lennon. It included so much detail about his life and how he interacted with the people around him. It was incredibly helpful with background information as well.

Cohen, Rich. *The Sun & the Moon & the Rolling Stones*. Headline, 2017.

This source allowed me to see Lennon's life from a different perspective.

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This just gave important, generalized, background information on John Lennon.

Norman, Philip. *Paul McCartney: the Life*. Back Bay Book, 2017.

This book told some of the same things as the ones about John, but from a different perspective. Sometimes it is important to have multiple perspectives.



Noyer, Paul Du. *John Lennon: the Stories behind Every Song 1970-1980*. Carlton Books Ltd., 2010.

This book helped me understand Lennon's thought process behind each song and why he chose to express himself in the way he did.

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[www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/the-british-invasion-from-the-beatles-to-the-stones-the-sixties-belonged-to-britain-244870/](http://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/the-british-invasion-from-the-beatles-to-the-stones-the-sixties-belonged-to-britain-244870/).

This website gave an extensive history of the British Invasion and helped to analyze The Beatles' role in it.