

# The Beatles in America: A Cultural Invasion [B2]

Sessant'anni fa, i Beatles visitarono l'America per la prima volta. In sole due settimane, la loro visita trasformò per sempre la società americana. Il documentario Beatles '64 esplora il loro grande salto verso la celebrità globale

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On 7 February 1964, The Beatles arrived in New York City for a historic two-week visit to the US; a visit which would change both countries forever. In what was quickly called a musical and cultural "invasion", Beatlemania would take America, altering the US's musical direction and radically changing the attitudes of the country's youth.

## BEATLES '64

On 9 February, The Beatles appeared on the popular TV variety programme The Ed Sullivan Show. Out of a population of 192 million, an incredible seventy-three million viewers tuned in. The country virtually stopped as The Beatles produced an electrifying performance. The live appearance catapulted the group, first to US fame and then to international stardom. The Beatles would then dominate America's music scene. In 1964 alone they had seventeen US Top 40 singles, including six number ones, and six Top 10 albums, with four number ones.

## UNFORGETTABLE MUSIC

Americans had never heard anything like the music of The Beatles before: upbeat, instantly catchy tunes, with simple, unforgettably joyous lyrics repeated hypnotically, all delivered with infectious energy. The public was also seduced by the charisma and cheeky wit of the four hirsute young men, with their mohair suits and shaggy hairdos.

## AMERICA'S YOUTH

The Beatles had a profound effect on American society, most especially on young people, the Black population, and popular music. For young people, in the words of one social commentator, the Liverpudlians' rebellious attitude "exposed the Establishment's conformist attitudes and made the band look like **freedom deliverers**." Horrified conservative parents, convinced that the group wanted to corrupt their children, put "Stamp out The Beatles" stickers on their cars! For one journalist, these parents were too late: The Beatles "**blew open the doors** of the 1960s," provoking a "new shared **joy**, which **shook the Establishment to its core** and **laid claim** to a brand new kind of youth mandate." Teenagers formed groups in garages. They suddenly felt liberated from restrictive conservative customs.

## SUBVERTING THE STATUS QUO

Equally important was the group's effect on both America's Black population and society's attitude to Black music. As Smokey Robinson says in the documentary, The Beatles were the first white artists of their importance to say they loved and learnt from Black music. The group refused to play to segregated audiences, and these mixed-race concerts gave young people a common love, according to Robinson. It was the power of music that **overcame** the barrier between White and Black audiences. The Beatles also allowed America's White population to openly appreciate Black music for the first time. The group subverted the musical status quo.

## A POP MUSIC EXPLOSION

The Beatles also had a dynamic effect on America's music culture in general. They opened the door to a 1960s pop culture explosion, beginning the legendary, highly influential British Invasion. A huge wave of British **acts** would cross the Atlantic, including the Rolling Stones, The Kinks and The Who. The Beatles' success also helped inspire the 1960s counterculture in America. The Beatles' first visit to the US changed the country forever in so many ways. It also left the nation's people in a much happier, healthier state

than when the band **touched down** in New York on 7 February. On 22 November 1963, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas, leaving the country **grieving** and in deep shock. Many social commentators think that the visit of The Beatles helped to heal the US. As McCartney said, "Maybe America needed something like The Beatles to **lift it out** of mourning and just say, 'Life goes on'."

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# Glossary

- **catchy** = orecchiabili
- **lyrics** = testi
- **suits** = completi
- **joy** = gioia
- **acts** = artisti
- **lift it out** = tirare fuori da
- **wit** = arguzia, ingegno
- **blew open the doors** = spalancare la porta
- **shook the Establishment to its core** = scuotere le fondamenta
- **overcame** = superare
- **touched down** = arrivare
- **tuned in** = sintonizzarsi, collegarsi
- **stardom** = celebrità, fama
- **cheeky** = sfacciata
- **laid claim** = affermare
- **tunes** = canzoni
- **mohair** = fibra tessile
- **shaggy** = arruffate
- **freedom deliverers** = portatori di libertà
- **grieving** = essere in lutto, soffrire