BEATLEMANIA
Technology, Business, and Teen Culture in Cold War America

ANDRÉ MILLARD

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When asked to explain how his band had captured the hearts and minds of the global pop music audience, Brian Epstein said, "The Beatles are famous because they are good, but they are a cult because they are lucky ... they have an extraordinary ability to satisfy a certain hunger in the country." The Beatles happened to be at the right place at the right time, not just at that magic moment when they appeared on The Ed Sullivan Show, but throughout their long career. Had they emerged as a competent rock band a few years earlier or later, Beatlemania might have never happened because the special conditions that brought it to life would not have been present. They exploited a window of opportunity in the development of entertainment technology and transatlantic business networks that allowed them to saturate the media.

The Beatles arrived as a finished product at just the right time in the development of mechanized entertainment. They emerged when radio was king in popular music and left the world stage when entertainment was dominated by television. The deep roots of Beatlemania were growing well before the 1960s, when the advanced technology and manufacturing techniques developed during World War II were applied to entertaining the baby boomers who were born in the first years of peace. Social scientists and biographers have come up with some interesting and often imaginative explanations of Beatlemania, but its real foundation was technological rather than psychological. New technology was affecting all parts of the entertainment business, and the fruition of these technologies coincided with the demographic movements of the postwar boom. You don't really need a degree in sociology or psychology to understand why the Beatles conquered America in 1964; all you have to do is understand how all the new machines worked in their favor, and then do the baby boom math.

The Beatles rode the waves of technological innovation and demographic trends across the Atlantic, picking up these trends as they formed in the UK and joining the great surges of change occurring in the United States. As John Len-
The Beatles and their management had the intellectual curiosity to identify the significant trends in technology and culture and then exploit them. And their timing was always impeccable.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The driving force of Beatlemania was the growth of the audience for popular music. The great increase in the birth rate immediately after World War II, the baby boom, has shaped American and British popular culture for half of the twentieth century. The baby boom was a demographic cohort of around 77 million people born between 1946 and 1964, and this huge audience took the Beatles as their own. The number of Americans between eighteen and twenty-four increased by almost 50 percent during the 1960s, from 16.5 to 24.7 million. By 1964, about 40 percent of all Americans were aged twenty or less, and seventeen-year-olds were the largest age cohort in the United States, a lucrative market for a range of consumer goods and services, including records: 11 million girls had bought a good half of pop records in America by the time the Beatles arrived. 

Teenagers in the UK were not as numerous or as affluent, but they still had an impressive spending power. In the 1960s about 7.5 million of them were between twelve and twenty-four, and they spent about 3 million pounds a day. Out of an average take-home wage of five to seven pounds, the typical teenager would spend at least two pounds on clothes and buy at least one record. English teenagers did not have the cars or the televisions of their American counterparts, but as the economy grew steadily in the 1960s, they were able to buy transistor radios, portable record players, and tape recorders. What made the baby boom generation different from all those who went before was its affluence.

Demographics can explain the Beatles' huge sales figures, such as the 2.5 million records they sold in the United States during the first weeks of 1964. These were well-made records, but were they that good? Or was it that millions more people were now buying records? American record companies had already seen it coming. In 1954 they estimated that 5 million new record buyers would enter the market by the end of the decade. They were right. The sales of records doubled during the 1950s. By 1970 the average teenager was spending at least five times as much on records as he or she did in 1950. In England there could be no doubt that more people were buying records; the 9 million pounds spent on records in 1955 had increased to 14 million in 1957 (the result of the skiffle boom) and to 22 million by 1963. In that year the Daily Mirror was publishing stories about the 5.5 million "spendagers" in the UK, who were buying around 50 million records a year. Each week these consumers bought over 20 million pounds' worth of clothes, tape recorders, record players, and records. Every week they bought nine hundred thousand copies of teen magazines like Fabulous. 

Record sales reached a peak in the UK just as the Beatles hit their stride as studio musicians.

By the early 1960s the Beatles could appeal to the largest and most affluent group of teenagers there had ever been. Unlike other bands of their era that captured a portion of the youth market but could not hold it for very long, the Beatles held onto their fans for nearly a decade and along the way gathered more of them from broader age cohorts. As children of the war years, the Beatles were a few years older than the first of the baby boomers, and this slight age difference made them ideal heroes—older but not too old to push themselves out of the peer group into inaccessible adulthood. They kept pace with the spending power of this generation, who moved from buying singles to albums and from spending a few shillings to get into the Cavern to paying pounds to watch the Beatles in movie theaters. The Beatles were not the first entertainers to expand their fan base to embrace larger and older audiences—this was the path of pop music success that Brian Epstein had mapped out for all his groups. But while the Beatles engaged the adult audiences who tuned in every week to Sunday Night at the London Palladium or The Ed Sullivan Show, they were attracting the attention of younger and younger fans. The Beatles appeared at the right time with the right products in the flowering of baby boomers as consumers and, most important, managed to hang on to them longer than any other pop group.

Their music, look, and humor appealed to all ages. There was something in the Beatles' music that connected to the very young. After their triumphant tours of the United States, they appeared in a cartoon every Saturday morning from September 1965 until April 1969, and these were later shown in the United Kingdom and all over the world. The cartoons were rebroadcast in the 1970s as The Beatles. They continued to attract the band in the culture, and the continual discussion of a Beatles reunion kept the band in the public eye, and their music was still heard everywhere. The teens who bought Beatles records in the 1960s and 1970s had started out watching the band as cartoon characters in the 1960s.

Much has been written about the development of their music as the Beatles transformed themselves from teen idols into symbols of the sixties counterculture. They moved from producing single after single aimed at the pop audience to exquisitely crafted albums that appealed to highbrows and music critics.
transition was as fast as their rise to global prominence, only taking two years to move from “She Loves You” to “In My Life,” and then another two from Rubber Soul to Sgt Pepper. The Beatles were able to engage older listeners and broaden their appeal to both sexes over time. Their growing artistry also attracted more males to their fan base, because boys were usually more interested in the music than the image, and many of them hoped to form a band just like the Beatles.

The progression of the band's music went hand in hand with the development of the pop music record as a consumer product. The industry they entered in the early 1960s was dominated by the single, which at 59 to 99 cents in the United States and 6 shillings, 3 pence, in England was well within the financial resources of young consumers. Many millions of babysitting and yardwork dollars and pounds were invested in Beatles records. In England the sales of singles reached a peak in 1964, accounting for eight out of ten records purchased, just at the right time to turn the Beatles into pop stars. But from then onward the proportion of singles in total sales decreased and the long-playing record became the vehicle for popular music, just as the Beatles moved from recording singles to concept albums.

Their involvement in films helped them engage a wider customer demographic. Their first film was directly aimed at the American teen audience who were desperate to see their heroes for the first time or eager to relive their concert experience—young girls stood in line for the film and watched it repeatedly. Yet the film also received acclaim from the critics and the adult audience, who might have been embarrassed by Beatlemania but were impressed with the whimsical humor and avant-garde pretensions on film. The transition into serious artists certainly lost them a portion of the teen and preteen audience, who were often confused by their post-Rubber Soul music and soon migrated to other adorables mop-top bands like the Monkees, but the Beatles as film stars still managed to keep a foot in both camps. The chief artifact of this accomplishment is their cartoon Yellow Submarine (1968), a full-length feature that impressed film and music critics with its inventiveness, yet captivated the very young, who consumed its pictures and music just like all the other cartoons they watched. Good cartoons are shown for decades, the best are immortal, and the Beatles' cartoons played an important role in introducing them to each succeeding generation.

Films brought massive new audiences to experience Beatlemania. It is hard to disagree with Bob Neaverson's conclusion: “Without film, the Beatles' global popularity would not and could not have existed to anything like the same degree.” The conflation of concert tours, records, and films into one text of Beatlemania was Brian Epstein's most brilliant idea. It exploited the synergy of different entertainments and technologies while creating a media narrative that was greater than the sum of its parts.

The army of salespeople and manufacturers who got onto the Beatles' bandwagon played their part in the media frenzy. Although popular music was already recognized as a means to reach young consumers, it took the Beatles to reveal its marketing potency. As soon as television producers like Jack Good and Dick Clark married the music to the image, pop music became the most effective vehicle to sell stuff to teenagers. Television and films exhibited fashions and the latest dances as well as the performers. They showcased a wide variety of goods and services. Beatlemania promoted the output of the multinationals that produced the records and the portable players, the agribusinesses who made chewing gum and sweet carbonated drinks, and the chemical companies who made toothpaste, dandruff shampoo, and acne creams. The generation that put Beatlemania on the map were throwing away their 1950s clothes and hair products, and the Beatles as usual were just ahead of them, as they moved from being Teddy Boys to England's most famous hippies. Embedded in all those photographs of girls screaming are the signs of significant changes in teen fashion, from the Bermuda shorts and bouffant hair styles of the early concerts to the full psychedelic regalia of the later shows. The Beatles were in the right place at the right time with the right music and the right clothes.

An article in Newsweek in 1963 added up the value of all the products sold by the band and found that merchandising far outstripped the sales of records and concert tickets. In 1964 the Beatles were expected to sell about 50 million dollars of merchandise. The company licensed to sell Beatle wigs was turning out about fifteen thousand a day, and many more unlicensed manufacturers were making this popular item. The Beatles' image was put on lunchboxes, sweatshirts, table lamps, and combs. The fans were collectors who traded badges, pins, photos, and even cards from Beatles bubble gum, “that rotten gum we had to chew for those pictures in the package.” At the height of Beatlemania one of the band's sponsors rightly judged the Beatles to be “the most powerful salesmen in the world today.”

TIMING

In November 1963 Brian Epstein made a preliminary trip to New York to finalize preparations for the upcoming tour, conferring with agents and promoters, visiting equipment manufacturers, making contact with the record companies who were handling his groups in the United States, and buying clothes for himself
Beatlemania and his travel companion and protégé, Billy J. Kramer. Here are all the different elements in Epstein's management of the Beatles, from making records to designing the look, and here we see the careful preparations for his masterstroke. In an interview with the Daily Mirror, Epstein revealed that "every aspect of their lives is carefully planned ... planning and timing are desperately important." Billy J. Kramer remembered that Epstein and the potential of the Beatles did not make much of an impression on the record company and venue management executives they visited, but Epstein got what he came for with top billing on The Ed Sullivan Show. During the visit he constantly asked American businessmen questions about the media, rather than the music. He had come in person to New York to find out all he could about American radio and television, for these were the tools he would employ in the band's upcoming tour.

Beatlemania had begun at a fortuitous moment in the development of British television and radio. The BBC monopoly of pop music broadcasting (with the distant and often faint competition from Radio Luxembourg) meant that if it did embrace a band, the group would dominate the airwaves. Because of the lack of competition, a program like Saturday Club had a captive audience of more than 3 million music-mad teenagers, who made up the bulk of English record buyers. Had pirate radio arrived a little earlier to challenge the BBC monopoly and steal away some of its young listeners, or had the Beatles peaked a little later, this huge listening audience would have been lost. The demand for rock and pop music programming could not be met by the BBC, which opened the door for independent radio stations that operated outside the law.

The first pirate radio station was Radio Caroline, which started broadcasting in 1964 from a vessel outside the UK's three-mile boundary. Because its programming depended totally on records, pirate radio delivered a far broader spectrum of popular music than the BBC, and unlike the state broadcaster, it played only pop. The pirates saw no need to pay royalties to record companies or artists and were not tied to them as Radio Luxembourg was. Other stations soon joined Caroline, helping out independent companies by making many of their records hits at the expense of the majors like EMI. After the government closed down the pirates in 1968, the music weekly Disc lamented: "Expect many of the small independent record companies to fold now there is no pirate radio."

The situation of American radio broadcasting when the Beatles first arrived in North America was completely different but no less advantageous. Instead of monopoly there was diversity, but the competition of television was driving important changes in radio organization and programming. The rise of television as a mass entertainer forced radio and film to look for new customers, because families now gathered around their television every night. Radio still reached a national audience through linked networks like NBC and CBS, but individual radio stations had to aim their programming at a local audience.

Instead of the free-for-all of the 1950s, when stations played a broad mix of popular, classical, country, and religious programming, and used live musicians as well as recordings, radio in the early 1960s was settling into the Top 40 format,
which depended on recorded music. The idea for this format came out of jukebox operations, where market research had shown that customers tended to play the same songs over and over again. In Top 40, the national charts determined what was being played, and these charts reflected sales in the big urban areas, which were easiest for the record companies to register and manipulate. Although Top 40 put a lot of power in the hands of program directors (who assembled the playlists), radio's celebrity deejays were still very powerful. In the big urban markets, the high-powered AM stations represented the networks, but the rise of independent stations provided more competition and put a premium on hiring a high-profile deejay and being the first to exploit the latest hit.

The radio industry the Beatles first engaged in North America was highly competitive, with long-running rivalries in most of the major cities they visited. In New York WMCA, WINS, and WABC struggled to dominate the biggest and most influential radio market in the country. In Cleveland it was WHK versus KYW. In Miami WFUN and WQAM battled it out. Top 40 radio was drawn to the Beatles because its programming was linked to the charts, and Beatles records dominated the Top 5 and 10. This symbiotic relationship helped the band monopolize the airwaves as well as the charts. The big stations in urban markets soon figured out that the Beatles were the key to getting an edge on their rivals. Each of them played the records nonstop and claimed the strongest links with the band. Thus WFUN became "Your Beatles station in Miami," and so on. The Beatles' management was also aware of this critical relationship: "They knew that there were hundreds of Top 40 stations and they were the keys to everything," said a deejay. Stations had to do more than just play Beatles records; they had to demonstrate an exclusive connection with them. This explains the frenzied response of the New York radio stations to the Beatles when they arrived, and the legions of deejays and radio correspondents who followed the band as they toured America. Each town they visited was just another battlefield in the radio wars, and radio stations competed strenuously to put on Beatles concerts, obtain advance release copies of the records, and broadcast interviews with the band members.

Radio provided the most immediate link between the Beatles and their followers, disseminating information, news reports, and special interviews that brought the band into the lives of radio listeners at a time when deejays were active in their communities and the fans viewed these on-air personalities as their friends. Local radio stations encouraged requests, organized fan clubs and concerts, compiled their own local charts, and devised daily contests to bring fans to the station.

These were not small-scale efforts; for example, a WMCA wig contest got eighty-six thousand entries. If anyone conducted or orchestrated Beatlemania, it was the radio deejays rather than the Beatles' management. The deejays maintained a continual dialogue with the fans over the air. They stoked the excitement, kept up anticipation with scraps of Beatles news, and were cheerleaders of concert frenzy. The Beatles helped out a lot of deejays, including characters like Murray the K, who high-jacked media attention in their first tour, but in return they won over the shock troops who would lead Beatlemania from the front.

**Television**

A few steps removed from the raucous radio announcers were the local television stations, who kept a respectable distance from the excesses of Beatlemania but nevertheless looked to it for programming. The interview with a local deejay, or a picture taken by a station publicist, would often find its way onto local television and then onto the national networks. Television not only exploited the entertainment value of popular music, but also saw its potential as news. The delivery of the news on television was changing like everything else. The five-minute news briefs of the late 1950s were expanded to all of fifteen minutes in the early sixties, and in the tumultuous year of 1963, CBS took the big step of increasing the program to thirty minutes and making the news anchor, a former press journalist named Walter Cronkite, the center of the show. This was an eventful year and a massive boost for television news. The Cuban Missile Crisis, civil rights demonstrations, and the tragic death of the president made television the prime disseminator of news. In the words of Erik Barnouw, those four days in November were "the most moving spectacular ever broadcast," and they brought television news to the pinnacle of its influence. By the time the Beatles touched down at Kennedy Airport, a majority of Americans got their news on television, and Walter Cronkite was the most trusted man in America. Television news introduced the Beatles to America and continued to promote Beatlemania with its growing technical expertise in remote broadcasts from the field.

The development of the televised variety show also came at the right time for the Beatles, as they moved from a scruffy beat group to all-around entertainers. In another example of their perfect timing, they emerged as polished television performers just as the medium was reaching a mass audience. Their appearances on Sunday Night at the London Palladium on one side of the Atlantic and The Ed Sullivan Show on the other occurred when these programs were attracting
their peak audience, including millions of people who would not have bothered watching a pop group. A few years later, specialized pop music shows aimed solely at teenagers had siphoned off much of this audience.

While Jack Good was pioneering teen music shows in Great Britain, American Bandstand was becoming an institution of American youth culture. It began in 1957 as the Philadelphia-based Bandstand and was soon broadcast to a national audience. Under the direction of Dick Clark, it became a powerful marketing tool for the records mimed on the program, although it had little of the excitement or the immediacy of the English teen music programs. Beatlemania encouraged the production of many more television shows aimed at the teenage audience. In June 1963 Thank Your Lucky Stars broadcast a "Mersey Beat Special" that featured many of Brian Epstein's groups and garnered an audience of 6 million. It was the work of Philip Jones, who had joined Granada TV from Radio Luxembourg and was one of the first broadcasters to see the potential of the Beatles when he first booked them in January 1963. By 1964 television stations around the world were scrambling to get some Mersey Beat for their programs, and American networks were frantically courting Jack Good. ABC debuted Shindig in September with a taped version of an English Ready Steady Go! program that was edited for American viewers. Good continued to produce shows for American television that featured the Beatles and other British Invasion acts, including a special program called Around the Beatles, which was broadcast on both sides of the Atlantic.

The visual impact of the British Invasion established youth music as a permanent fixture on television rather than a small daily dose or a weekly revue, and by the mid-1960s much more programming, like Ready Steady Go and Shindig, were competing for the attention of the teenage viewer. If the Beatles had emerged at this time, their television exposure would have reached a much smaller and more narrowly focused audience than those they engaged on the weekly variety shows a few years earlier. Would their impact have been so powerful if they had appeared on American Bandstand one summer afternoon instead of on The Ed Sullivan Show that frigid Sunday night, when the whole nation was sitting in front of the television? Probably not.

As soon as the Beatles made their successful debut on national television, their management ran down their radio exposure. After they returned from their first American tour, Epstein would only release them to make special programming, which was broadcast a few times each year during national holidays like Christmas. The same policy was applied to their television appearances. In the beginning of their television careers, the Beatles were happy to appear on variety, children's, and comedy shows, but as their fame grew, they became more discerning, moving to the same special event strategy that had worked so well on radio. The Beatles made thirty-seven appearances on television in 1963, but by 1966 they were down to four. Tape-recording technology made all this possible, because it ensured that every minute of the Beatles' output could be rearranged, recycled, and rebroadcast to fit the extraordinarily crowded schedule of the band.

Their management always adopted new technology with a view to exploiting the Beatles' time to the fullest.

Under Epstein's direction the Beatles became as skilled at television performance as their management was at negotiating special programming for the band. They appeared on scores of television shows between 1963 and 1965, becoming as ubiquitous on the small screen as they had been on radio. Their triumph at the Royal Variety Performance in November 1963 was not a lucky accident; it was the result of months of preparation and experimentation in getting the sound and look across perfectly. By the time they went to the CBS television studios on 53rd Street in New York to do The Ed Sullivan Show, they were masters of the media. No other pop group had as much experience on television as the Beatles. The day after they arrived in New York, they went to the television studios for a rehearsal and sound check. The technicians at CBS were impressed by the time and care the musicians and their road crew took in their extensive rehearsing, in which they practiced the songs and their positions on stage. After a thorough sound check, they carefully marked the levels of the mixes on the control console. The CBS crew was quite surprised when the group asked to listen to a playback of their rehearsal—nobody had ever asked for that before.

The Beatles had the technicalities all worked out and went through their preparations like the seasoned television performers they were. On the Sunday afternoon of all the songs before a specially invited studio audience. A different audience was seated for the live performance at 8 p.m. A Hard Day's Night gives us a detailed view of the daily work of the band in 1964, with lots of songs, news conferences, fittings with tailors, and a detailed narrative about the production of a television show that showed all the equipment involved. There is no scene of them working in a recording studio. At the height of Beatlemania, making appearances on television was as important, if not more important, than making records.

As the Beatles' annus mirabilis took shape, each step of the way was marked by a televised performance. Their appearance on Thank Your Lucky Stars, the top pop music show in England, was probably the critical element in pushing them and "Please Please Me" onto the national stage. The fact that they got this op-
portunity showed that they were now connected with the big players in the entertainment business. It also showed how important it was to have a management organization in London. Brian Epstein called on Dick James in his offices on Denmark Street to negotiate the rights to publish the Beatles' music. James picked up the phone and got the band on the show to demonstrate his influence. Epstein gave him the rights and made him a very rich man, but the Beatles got a priceless boost of publicity and prestige in return—just when they needed it most.21

Television was the most important ingredient in the bubbling stew of machines, media, and mass entertainment that made Beatlemania possible. The rise of the Beatles occurred just as television was connecting to a new audience of young music lovers. For all the weight that the guitars and amplifiers had on the Beatles sound, and for all the importance of tape recording in making their records, the most valuable technology in the Beatles' arsenal was television. Managing this media exposure was the secret to their phenomenal rise. They were the first band to negotiate the changes wrought to popular music by television.

THE STORY THE PRESS WAS WAITING FOR

The Beatles as a news story also developed at exactly the right time. In the 1960s both the American and the English newspapers were putting emphasis on feature stories about personalities when many of these new celebrities came from the world of entertainment. Competition with television news forced the print media to invigorate their content with more images and to appeal to a younger readership. People were getting their news in visual form before they went to bed rather than first thing in the morning, when the paper was delivered, and thus newspapers countered by offering more feature stories and putting more photographs on their pages.22 Television programmers were also looking to make their news (and newsreaders) more attractive and to personalize the news with stories built around interesting people.

The Beatles came along when the tabloids were at the peak of their powers in the United Kingdom. In 1964 the Daily Mirror sold about 5 million copies a day, giving it a readership of around 12 million Britons, one-third of all the adults in the country.23 The tabloids were moving eagerly into feature stories about youth music, mod fashions, and teenage angst. The scale of Beatlemania and its juicy connections with other tabloid obsessions—the new rich, teenage delinquency, the swinging set, and the competition with the United States—made it the story of the decade. Even after the Beatles had broken up, the press kept the story alive by floating rumors about a reunion or the death of a band member. For tabloids like the Daily Mirror, Beatlemania was a very important story. Don Short, the Mirror's entertainment writer, was close to the band and their circle; he was a journalist they could trust, in the words of Tony Bramwell. In exchange for adhering to the NEMS line, a few favored journalists like Short were supplied the exclusive material their editors craved above all else. This relationship helped Brian Epstein control the image he had created for the band.24

Running parallel to the rise of the feature story, and the creation of a new set of rock'n'roll celebrities, was the growth of music journalism. Entertainment in the 1950s did not have the place it now occupies in our newspapers and television programs. It was a sideline, tucked away in the back of the paper, a small part of the overall picture of the world dominated by great events and important people. The national papers did not have much time for pop musicians unless they were misbehaving. This lack of coverage pushed fans and amateur journalists into starting up periodicals devoted to the local music scene, like Mersey Beat, which would play such an important part in publicizing the Beatles. The Beatles emerged into public consciousness as more journalists moved into reporting about popular music and its even more popular musicians. Even the stuffy broadsheets like the Daily Telegraph developed an interest in the pop music business and joined the tabloids in publishing a weekly top ten of record sales.25 Over two hundred journalists attended the Beatles' first news conference at Kennedy Airport. The people who attended later conferences at the Plaza Hotel said they were as big and as buzzing with excitement as the press conferences given at the White House by a young and extremely media savvy president.

The Beatles managed to engage the press on many different levels. The tabloids were always hungry for pictures and gossip, and the magazine trade also depended on a steady diet of interviews and photographs. Even serious newspapers like the London Times took an interest, and its music correspondent took time off from reviewing symphony orchestras to discuss the finer points of the Beatles' music. In the United States, the weekly news magazines Time and Newsweek broke the news first, and as soon as the band arrived at Kennedy Airport, the New York dailies rushed in, and the rest of the country's newspapers piled on. At the other end of the news hierarchy, local papers engaged budding young journalists to write columns about music and fashions inspired by the Beatles. These "teen editors" helped newspapers reach affluent young consumers and attract advertisers. A trickle-down effect of the British Invasion enriched business.
was also about the accents and the clothes, and consequently retailers organized fashion shows around the new "London" styles and brought in amateur guitar bands to give the shows some swinging appeal.

The Beatles became famous when images were critical to news coverage and newspapers were putting illustrated magazines in their Sunday editions. The Sunday Times introduced a color magazine in 1962, employing a photogravure process that made the images clearer and brighter. The potency of the image was one of the important threads in the construction of the "Swinging Sixties." The Beatles' carefully manipulated look reached full bloom just when the press was craving attractive images: the suits, the hair, the guitars, and how they held them on stage all came together effortlessly into one irresistible whole at exactly the moment when the Beatles' abilities as pop musicians had reached a peak.

MEDIA SATURATION

The image, the music, and the media exposure came together in 1963. Whether by luck or by incredible planning, Brian Epstein and the management team exploited it all to saturate the media, first in England in 1963 and then in the United States in 1964. The strategy blanketed radio, television, and the press and worked to exclude other acts and interests. This phenomenon was first explored by the French writer Jacques Attali, who realized the power of repetitious acts in fundamentally altering codes of social reproduction. Recording technology turned performance (representation) into machine-made copies, and music into a competitive commodity, "colonized and sanitized. Attali looked forward to a society in which "nothing will happen anymore."28

When Beatlemania first appeared on the front page of the tabloids in November 1963, it was "happening everywhere!" and by February the next year, the press was saying, "You can't get away from them." Even the wife of the British prime minister, Mary Wilson, felt she had to tell the public that "the Beatles are quite the favorites in our home."27 The Beatles' brand became so powerful that it trumped all others: Capitol Records answered its phones as the Beatles' record company, Pan Am renamed the jet carrying the Beatles after the band, and numerous radio stations claimed to have been taken over by the Fab Four. This media saturation had a life of its own—generating interest from far away and then building up its energy as it came closer. It created a sense of anticipation that fueled the mass hysteria for the whole of 1964.

Media saturation meant that the binary code of 1960s print and broadcasting journalism split the world of popular music between the Beatles and all the rest. Along with their music on the radio and constant exposure in the press, the Beatles on television forged a media ubiquity that made it difficult to avoid them (if you were young and connected to the world of pop music—large segments of the population had no interest in them). During the exceptionally cold winter of 1962–1963, the more than usually lethargic British radio and television audience was bombarded with the Beatles. Other records had been overplayed on radio and jukeboxes, and there was even a 1963 pop song ("Footstomp" by Jet Harris and Tony Meehan) about this saturation: "Now I've heard that tune so much/I wished that I was dead." But the Beatles' music seemed to be everywhere, and there was no escaping it. The exposure to their records coincided with the massive press coverage that left no event in their lives unreported and made the individual Beatles seem closer and more familiar than any of their contemporaries.

You might know of the Dave Clark Five or Brian Poole and the Tremeloes (the band that Decca chose to sign rather than the Beatles), but you did not know the names (or the personalities) of the members of the band because there was nowhere near as much information about them. A lot of Americans (and several British newspaper editors) did not realize these two groups were from London, not Liverpool. The Beatles got so much airtime that you felt you knew them as individuals, recognizing their faces and voices, and building a character profile of each member. Did anyone know the name of the drummer of the Big Three or the Swinging Blue Jeans, the Liverpudlian bands who were competitors of the Beatles? But Ringo, on the other hand, was a name everyone knew.

The Beatles invasion of America had really begun months before they landed in New York. The sequence of press articles, television spots, radio play, record releases, and Capitol's massive marketing campaign prepared the way for the personal appearances that culminated this long period of incubation. Looking at this process from the viewpoint and timeline of an American teenager is instructive. The first inklings that the Beatles were something beyond the average boy band came in the televised reports of English Beatlemania and the press articles in November and December 1963. A very small number of Americans who had pen pals in Liverpool have the honor of being the first American Beatle fans. Some of them even got the records mailed to them. Then came the radio play, muted at first, then growing in intensity as Capitol ratcheted up the promotion for "I Want to Hold Your Hand." While everyone in high school was talking about "I Want to Hold Your Hand," the news broke that the Beatles were going to appear on The Ed Sullivan Show, and this ratcheted up the suspense a few more notches: "It just started that incredible curiosity . . . I couldn't wait to see these guys on tv."29 If you missed that show, you were immediately told about it at school the
next day, and then you had two more chances to see the band as they appeared on Ed Sullivan for the next two weekends. Meanwhile their records were playing continuously on the radio, as many stations switched all their programming to Beatlemania.

The Beatles' first visit to America was not really a tour, because they played only three live performances for audiences in Washington and New York after The Ed Sullivan Show. The real tour was scheduled to begin in August. Between the band's departure from New York on February 21 and their arrival back again in Los Angeles on August 18, Vee Jay Records released an EP of earlier material in March, Capitol released the The Beatles' Second LP in April, another EP in May, and an LP, Something New, in July. The large number of Beatles records in the April Billboard charts shows how quickly the record companies responded to the band's popularity by releasing as much music as possible. A film of one Washington performance was shown in selected theaters in March, and the A Hard Day's Night soundtrack album was released in June. In July came the news that the film would soon be released in the United States, which was a welcome break in the fans' "long wait" for the Beatles as the summer vacation wore on.

Cinemas and radio stations began promotional campaigns that made buying a ticket for the Beatles' film an event, and the lucky fans who had camped out all night got special badges that said "I've Got My Beatles Movie Ticket, Have You?" A Hard Day's Night was an exceptional film in many ways, but it worked best as a substitute for the live performances and sense of intimacy that was central to Beatlemania. The film opened simultaneously in over five hundred American cinemas in the summer of 1964—perfectly placed between two American tours. As another example of Beatlemania, it generated as much news coverage as the concerts. The blanket release was a complete success, and it would lead to the mass marketing of blockbuster movies in the 1970s and 1980s, in which intensive advertising was followed by a simultaneous opening in hundreds of theaters.

The film was marketed in tandem with the soundtrack album. After hundreds of thousands of fans had seen the film repeatedly over the summer, the excitement was in full swing by the time the band actually arrived in August to start the tour. Radio stations announced the dates for the tour as early as March, and fans lined up, with media attention on the lucky ones as they posed triumphantly with tickets in hand or on the unlucky who moaned, "I'll just die if I don't get one." Radio stations and concert venues were in full swing with competitions and other promotions linked to the acquisition of those priceless tickets.

The Beatles' management staged the same process of fostering anticipation and building a surge of multimedia support to promote Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. The ten-month gap after the release of Revolver had led to rumors that the band was either running out of inspiration or engaged in a historic project that would change pop music forever. The release of "Strawberry Fields Forever" in January 1967 confirmed that the Beatles were indeed making extraordinarily ambitious pop music, which only increased anticipation of the album. Tapes of a song called "A Day in the Life Of" leaked out, and as Greil Marcus said, "The record, unheard, was everywhere." When EMI and Capitol finally released it in June, tracks from the album swamped the airwaves in America and Europe. While Langdon Winner was writing that the release of this album was the closest Western civilization had come to unity since the Congress of Vienna in 1815, Greil Marcus was crossing the United States on Interstate 90, hearing it everywhere he went, "wafting in from some far-off transistor radio or portable hi-fi." Lester Bangs has pointed out that the British Invasion was more about an event than the music, but this event swept all before it, for as Paul McCartney admitted, there was a time in the 1960s "when everything was about The Beatles. We were simply everywhere you looked."