

Topic Page: [Lennon, John \(1940 - 1980\)](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/lennon_john_1940_1980)

Definition: **Lennon, John** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

English singer and songwriter, a member of The Beatles. Lennon co-wrote the vast majority of The Beatles' songs with Paul McCartney, and appeared in the band's films and in *How I Won the War* (1967). He published *In His Own Write* (1964) and *A Spaniard in the Works* (1965). A major figure in the peace movement, he married Yoko Ono (1933-) in 1969. His solo albums include *Imagine* (1971) and *Double Fantasy* (1980). On December 8, 1980, Lennon was shot dead by Mark Chapman in New York City.

Summary Article: **Lennon, John (1940–1980)**

From *Encyclopedia of Activism and Social Justice*

Born October 9, 1940, John Lennon remains one of the most influential composers and performers of 20th-century popular music. Lennon also worked as a peace activist, artist, and author. An art-school dropout from Liverpool, England, Lennon was the founding member of the Beatles. In 1966, Lennon met the artist Yoko Ono, and the pair began an affair in 1968; Lennon's estranged wife Cynthia filed for divorce later that year, and Lennon and Ono married in 1969.

Lennon and Ono devoted a great deal of time to participating in public protests against the Vietnam War, and after their marriage, the pair spent their honeymoon holding a "bed-in" for peace in Amsterdam, conducting interviews and speaking out in favor of world peace from bed. The duo held a second bed-in, this time at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel in Montreal, Canada. During this second bed-in, Lennon and Ono recorded "Give Peace a Chance," which became an important song for the peace movement and remains one of their best-known collaborations.

As demonstrated by the bed-ins, Lennon and Ono carried out their political engagement with a sense of humor. Another example of their whimsical treatment of serious topics was the concept of "bagism," which they introduced at a press conference in 1969. To subscribe to bagism would be to literally wear a bag covering the entire body, thereby ensuring that no one could judge you based on physical attributes and forcing people to actually listen to what you had to say. Also in 1969, Lennon went so far as to send back the Member of the Order of the British Empire he had received from Queen Elizabeth II during the height of the Beatles popularity as a protest against Britain's involvement in Nigeria-Biafra and its support of the United States and the Vietnam War.

After the Beatles broke up in 1970, Lennon's musical work became increasingly political. He released his most successful solo album, *Imagine*, in 1971; the title track became an anthem for anti-war and peace movements. On November 1, 1971, he appeared at a concert at the Apollo Theater benefiting the families of inmates of Attica Prison. On January 1, 1972, the U.S. Senate Internal Security Subcommittee of the Judiciary Committee prepared a memo detailing Lennon's involvement with political radicals such as Jerry Rubin, Abbie Hoffman, and Rennie Davis. This memo was followed by a February 4, 1972, secret memo penned by Senator Strom Thurmond suggesting to Attorney General John Mitchell that Lennon be deported. The two memos resulted in the beginning of deportation proceedings with the expiration of Lennon's U.S. non-immigrant visa, which began a 4-year battle for Lennon as he fought to stay in the United States.

Some Time in New York City, released in 1972, was even more explicitly political. It included songs

about topics ranging from prison riots to the British role in the conflicts in Northern Ireland to his own difficulty obtaining a U.S. green card. Among the most controversial of his works was the song “Woman Is the Nigger of the World,” an anti-sexism song stating that while racial minorities were discriminated against in some places, women were discriminated against globally. The song was banned in nearly all markets, though Lennon did perform it live on television on the *Dick Cavett Show*.

In 1973, Ono sent Lennon away, charging their personal assistant May Pang with caring for Lennon in whatever ways necessary. Pang and Lennon went to Los Angeles, where they remained until Lennon and Ono were reunited in 1975. This separation is referred to as Lennon’s “lost weekend” period. For most of the late 1970s, Lennon took a hiatus from his recording career, reentering the charts with his first single in more than 5 years, “(Just Like) Starting Over,” released October 23, 1980. Lennon was shot less than 2 months later on December 8, 1980, when a deranged man fired at him outside of the Dakota apartment building in New York City. Lennon was pronounced dead at Roosevelt Hospital.

In 1984, an area of New York City’s Central Park named Strawberry Fields, dedicated to John Lennon, was opened. In 1992, John Lennon was inducted to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and was later recognized by the Lifetime Achievement Award at the 34th Annual Grammy Awards.

See also

Performance Art, Political; Rock ‘n’ Roll

Further Readings

- Goldman, A. (2001). *The lives of John Lennon*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press.
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