



# The British Invasion

The British Invasion refers to the large number of British bands that entered the United States behind the large success of The Beatles in 1964. “Beatlemania” was generated not only by their fresh new sound, but also by certain historical factors, that had nothing to do with the Beatles.

The first great revolution of Rock ‘n’ Roll had begun around 1954 with Bill Haley and the Comets “Rock Around the Clock” and a string of other hits by Elvis Presley, but died out quickly for a number of reasons. In 1957, Little Richard withdrew from rock to pursue religion; 1958, Elvis was drafted into the army; later that year, Jerry Lee Lewis success came to a screeching halt when he married his 14 year old cousin; Buddy Holly, Richie Valens, and the Big Bopper died in a plane crash; and Chuck Berry was arrested in 1959 and imprisoned from 1962-64. Rock and Roll had declined. College students began to become interested in folk music, and a folk/pop hybrid that spread to the mainstream from artists such as Peter, Paul and Mary and other folk music trios.

Many Americans were aware of the British Rock ‘n’ Roll revolution, but America was on top of the world and did not need British pop music. All of this American identity was shattered when the young and promising President Kennedy was assassinated in November 1963, leaving America shocked and depressed.

The Beatles then burst open the scene with the sound of “I Want to Hold Your Hand,” followed by their most famous appearance on the *Ed Sullivan Show* on February 7, 1964. They followed this up with many number one hits which allowed for many Americans to forget their troubles. They had charming British accents, quick, sharp wit, and charisma that charmed American audiences during their interviews. The matching lounge suits, and moptop haircuts were also new and exciting.

Despite this new “revolution,” many American record labels were still confident of their own creations, ignored the new British pop, claiming it was an inferior imitation of their own music. They felt that England did not have the right social dynamics to spur a Rock ‘n’ Roll revolution. They believed that England lacked the spirit of rebellion and ethnic/cultural diversity that spurred the first Rock ‘n’ Roll movement.

The British bands received much influence from American Rhythm and Blues. They responded with to the music of many black Americans, and embraced the blues more readily than most Americans. Many Americans had a difficult time embracing the Rhythm and Blues because they considered it “race music.” Hundreds of blues bands sprouted up in London. Many of the blues bands created many of the famous artists we know today. It was a training ground for artists such as Eric Clapton and Jack Bruce, who formed the band Cream; Peter Green, John McVie, and Mick Fleetwood, who later formed Fleetwood Mac; and Mick Taylor, who eventually replaced Brian Jones of the Rolling Stones. The All-Stars had Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page, and Jeff Beck. Blues Incorporated hosted Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Brian Jones, and Charlie Watts, all of whom eventually formed the Rolling Stones.

Many British bands stuck with the R&B influence, but many began to create a pop style in order to score a hit record. The Kinks and The Who were open to pop influences, and attracted many followers. Both bands were searching for the same sound, something new and edgy, but The Kinks beat The Who to the punch. The Kinks produced the very spastic and edgy “You Really Got Me,” the hardest, most intense rock ever heard at that time. The Who rose to the challenge with “My Generation.”

Most bands were not as successful in merging their developing blues style with the pop appeal of American music. Many British bands struggled to maintain this balance. They had to balance their artist integrity with the commercial success and what the public wanted. Manfred Mann tried to maintain the dual identity by delivering pop fluff like “Doo Wah Diddy Diddy” to finance their pursuit of blues and jazz.

The Beatles, and many other British bands, had both a short term, and long term influence. They inspired many imitators who cashed in on their success, and most of them turned out to be one-hit wonders, which was most of the British Invasion.

The British Invasion had brought new music and a new sound into the United States. This “invasion” officially ended when some American groups copied the style of The Beatles and added their own twist. Groups who were influenced by the British Invasion, like Bob Dylan, The Byrds, and The Beach Boys, actually began to influence The Beatles. The Beatles were one of the only original British bands to adjust to the musical climate of the United States, which led to their ultimate long term success. The Beatles and the British Invasion led to an unprecedented style of new music into the very stable musical style of the United States in the early 1960’s.

#### **ADDITIONAL BRITISH INVASION BANDS AND THEIR HITS**

The Troggs: “Wild Thing”

The Yardbirds: “For Your Love”

Herman’s Hermits: “I’m Into Something Good”

The Kinks: “You Really Got Me”

The Zombies: “She’s Not There”

Gerry and the Pacemakers: “How Do You Do It”

The Hollies: “Long Cool Woman in a Black Dress”

The Dave Clark Five: “Can’t You See That She’s Mine”