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[***The U.S. vs. John Lennon* Resuscitates the Dream**](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-simmons/the-us-vs-john-lennon-res_b_29446.html)

On December 8th, 1980 - the night John Lennon was murdered - I despondently slouched into The Troubadour, the nightclub in Los Angeles that John had been thrown out of almost-seven years before. I was friends with the bouncer, a neo-wiseguy from Brooklyn. "What'sa matta wit joo?" he asked when he saw my blood red eyes - on this night red from crying, not Jack Daniel's. "Ya know, John Lennon..." I mumbled. "Don't cry fuh 'im, cry fuh yuh-self," he advised.

He must've been the Oracle of Flatbush, because the following 26 years have been intolerable. Reagan had been elected a month before that night and The Dream wasn't merely over, it was forcibly shut down, declared illegal, and -- even worse - rendered *discussion non grata*. For those of us who, however naively, believed in The Dream of Love, Peace & Justice and who'd declared ourselves citizens of Woodstock Nation, we have felt lost ever since. John's death wasn't the only factor, but it was the single most powerful symbol that we just weren't made for these times.

[*The U.S. vs. John Lennon*](http://www.theusversusjohnlennon.com/), a new documentary by David Leaf and John Scheinfeld, opens in NY and LA this Friday and it couldn't arrive sooner. The entire Bush/Cheney garbage dump of war/corporatism/wiretapping/etc. is a sequel to the Nixon/Agnew original and, like all sequels, it's intolerably worse than the original. Historical eras are never pristinely analogous, but overall this is *same shit, different day*.

The film chronicles the Beatle's outspoken nature as he's crucified for making the "We're more popular than Jesus" observation in 1966. Lennon and the Beatles were beyond celebrities - they were the four deities of young people all over the world. John was uniquely brilliant, artistic, sarcastically funny, and rebellious. He publicly stated that "our society is run by insane people for insane objectives."

When he and performance artist Yoko Ono fell in love, they conceived ways to use the relentless media hounding of them to CHANGE THE WORLD. "We're selling it like soap," John said. "You've gotta sell and sell until the housewife thinks 'oh, peace and war - that's the two products.'" Then-anti-war activist and photographer (now in public relations for various noble causes) [David Fenton](http://www.fenton.com/) notes in the film that John and Yoko chose "the conscious use of one's myth to project a political, social, poetic goal. It had never happened before."

After their marriage in 1969, they held Bed-Ins in Amsterdam and Montreal where they stayed in a hotel bed for a week at a time and invited the press, who camped out for the duration. The couple hung signs that read BED PEACE and HAIR PEACE and pleaded for an end to war and violence. He and Yoko recorded "Give Peace A Chance" in the Montreal hotel room and it became the anthem of the anti-war movement. Later that year, they rented huge billboards in eleven cities that read WAR IS OVER - IF YOU WANT IT - HAPPY XMAS, JOHN AND YOKO. "It's cheaper than somebody's life," quipped John.

In 1971, Lennon released "Imagine," a powerful plea for idealism so gentle, most people forget how explosively radical it is. Among other concepts, John sang "Imagine no possessions" and "Imagine no religion." These are sentiments that, made manifest, would instantly rid the world of most of its problems.

John and Yoko became friends with many in the American anti-war movement, notably the Yippies (Jerry Rubin, [Stew Albert](http://www.stewalbert.com/), [Paul Krassner](http://www.paulkrassner.com/), Abbie Hoffman) and Black Panther [Bobby Seale](http://www.bobbyseale.com/). At the same time, they decided to live in NYC. The Nixon Administration took notice when Lennon publicly supported [John Sinclair](http://www.johnsinclairradio.com/), the White Panthers chairman/MC5 manager who was into two-and-a- half years of a nine-and-a-half to ten year sentence for giving an undercover cop two joints. Sinclair was a charismatic poet and community organizer as well and the feds and Michigan state authorities deemed him a "threat to society" and refused him an appeal bond. Sinclair was an icon to the young and pissed-off and his imprisonment representative of everything utterly stupid and evil about the American judicial system. Hipped to Sinclair by Yippies Rubin and Albert, Lennon wrote a song called "John Sinclair" and agreed to play a benefit concert for him on December 10, 1971. The two Johns became a symbiosis of British and American youth rebellion.

John and Yoko recognized that cultural revolutionaries like the Yippies, White Panthers and even more explicitly militant groups like the Black Panthers were artists and vice-versa. The Yippies' program was to capture the imagination of young people and hope their politics would follow. Lennon dug - he'd been in the imagination racket for years. Sinclair was released from prison three days after the concert and John Lennon - like Sinclair -- was immediately deemed a threat to society.

For the following four years, the Nixon Administration and (especially after Wategate booted Tricky Dick out of the White House in 1974) the Immigration and Naturalization Service tried to deport Lennon. Reams of [declassified FBI documents](http://www.lennonfbifiles.com/), doggedly unearthed by author and professor [Jon Wiener](http://www.jonwiener.com/) (an unsung and unassuming American hero), show the machinations of the feds who concealed their motive. "The official reason was that I was busted in England for pot," said Lennon at the time. "The real reason is I'm a peacenik." EVERYONE KNEW IT, yet the government (to paraphrase the late Lenny Bruce) DENIED, DENIED, DENIED.

The couple were wiretapped and followed for years. Their immigration lawyer Leon Wildes kept postponing and postponing and Lennon/Ono kept staying and staying. It was a tortuous merry-go-round of court hearings, pointless harassment and a tedious hassle that temporarily took its toll on their marriage. The film shows a period clip of a sardonic John quoting his sardonic friend, writer [Terry Southern](http://www.terrysouthern.com/): "It keeps the conservatives happy that they're doing something about us or what we represent. And it keeps the liberals happy 'cause I haven't actually been thrown out. So everybody's happy."

A plan for John and Yoko to play outside the Republican Convention in 1972 was scuttled when they deemed the situation too hot. "If we had gone to the Republican Convention, we would have been in danger of our lives," Yoko notes in the film in a contemporary interview that has eerie implications given the tragedy of John's death. But despite conventional wisdom (an oxymoron, to be sure), Lennon/Ono never completely backed down and they continued occasional public appearances at anti-war rallies. They and Wildes sued the Nixon Cabal for a conspiracy to deny them justice. On October 9, 1975, Wildes notified John and Yoko that the Court of Appeals overturned the deportation order. It was John's 35th birthday and the day the couple's son Sean was born.

*The U.S. vs. John Lennon* co-directors Leaf and Scheinfeld have gifted us with 99 minutes of optimism in a time of peril, pessimism and desperation. The story is carefully sculpted with few nicks. If you, like me, have spent many days in the last 26 years unsure where to turn, turn into your movie theater. Remember, or perhaps see for the first time, what it was like to believe that you and a few million others could change the world - and did. In the past quarter-century, idealism has been ridiculed by the jaded and too hip. But as author Gore Vidal states in the film, "Lennon...represented life and is admirable. And Mr. Nixon and Mr. Bush represent death. And that is a bad thing."

Special note must be made of the amazing Yoko Ono, the other genius, who brought techniques she'd developed in the Fluxus art movement into her artistic and political relationship with John Lennon. She taught John to be fearlessly silly in the pursuit of The Dream. Without Yoko, there would have been a much different, much less fun, much less compelling story. Yoko and John were two misfit artists who changed history and lived one of the great love stories of all time in the process.

So what do we do after the movie? John Lennon knew as it was unfolding:

"Our job now is to tell them that there is still hope and we still have things to do and we must get out there and change their heads and tell them it's OK, we can change it...It's only the beginning. We're just in the inception. We're just in the beginning of change. And they're all apathetic because they're young and they think 'oh, it didn't work today, so it's all over.' We must get them excited about what we can do again...Viva la revolucion!"

Imagine.