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[*Imagine*] A World at Peace

Allowing the listener to envision a world at peace without the barriers of borders, John Lennon's single *Imagine* captures a world that isn't divided by religion or nationalities and could thrive without materialistic things. The signature song denoted chaotic social issues ranging from politics and religion, to hunger and poverty. Lennon was inspired by his wife's poems in her 1964 book *Grapefruit*, which was also chosen as the background design of the *Imagine* album cover. Lennon had a vast number of songs that impacted culture but *Imagine* resonated the greatest globally. Released in October of 1971, the song radicalized the issues going on worldwide at the time (Ulster, 2015) like communism and war, "political protest in the United states could be recognized in forms that looked remarkably like protest communities anywhere in the world of its time or from generations before: groups of individuals congregating in a particular place to make a statement against political policies that were objectionable in some fashion, most notably those regarding the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War," (Krieger,2014). Lennon wanted to promote peace among the people amid the chaos.

This song still has the exact amount of relevance today, if not more, than it did when it was released in the 70's. In today's society, we are still dealing with immigration laws, discrimination against religion, race and sex, and many other political and social issues. *Imagine* challenges the listener to think about a utopian universe that operates without social norms politics and religion. The song doesn't tell the listener to drop the constraints of how they express or define themselves, but imagine the unimaginable in the world. It was an anthem for the humankind, to know every individual is embraced not by their color and beliefs are, but as humans.

“Imagine there’s no heaven, its easy if you try, no hell below us, Above us only sky...”

is the first line and concept Lennon mentions in the song. This line is depicting religions, and Lennon is recognizing the fact that there are disagreements among religions and chaos forming among them. The line is not meant to reject any God, but persuade the listener to be on guard against things that divide people. Lennon also wants people to live in the present moment, rather than having death in our headspace. When religions don’t exist, there is no divide in opinions.

Lennon then wants the audience to imagine a world without countries and boundaries, *“Imagine there’s no countries, it isn’t hard to do, Nothing to kill or die for, And no religion too, imagine all the people living life in peace...”*. This line is making the listener visualize a world as one nation, without governments, war and leaders. The Cold War at this time was between two power countries, The United States and The Soviet Union but it involved many other countries. Following The Cold War was The Vietnam War, which was between more than just two countries (Krieger, 2014). The involvement of countries in these wars meant sacrificing innocent souls, for simply having pride in their nationality. Lennon wants the listener to imagine a world without these divisions and there no need of war and killings to defend a country. Although, the world is not at as devastating wars as they were in pre 1970’s, there is still a divide across the world and the nation itself. People speculate there has never been more of a political divide across the world and especially the United States than there is today. There has been an increase in gun violence, disagreements on gay marriage and the rights of the LGBTQ community, immigration laws, gender identity issues and several others. Although maybe the increase of the political divide and these issues is directly caused by the technological advances since 1970. Allowing the following verse in the song to relate to common issues like possessions and money-oriented items today.

Lennon gets more spiritual in the third verse by attempting to get the audience to envision a life without possessions, poverty and materialistic things, “*Imagine no possessions, I wonder if you can, no need for greed or hunger, A brotherhood of man, Imagine all the people, Sharing all the world...*”. Wealth has always been envied, especially by those who cannot obtain it, “It would be very difficult indeed to mention any time when there were no rich men, and still harder to mention a time when the power of wealth was not admired and envied, and given its sway” (Sumner, 2008). Ironically, the song was shot at a grand piano in Lennon’s luxurious mansion at the time. Wealth in time has grown from the amount of land you own; to the house you are living in to the technology you possess. When Lennon wrote this song, 40 years after the Great Depression, there was a rise in income and wealth inequalities and have continued to increase (Wilterdink, 2016). With the constant technological innovations and advances still occurring today, the demand for manual labor work is decreasing. Therefore, individuals who have obtained only a basic education struggle to find a well paid job, creating a wage gap between the well-educated and low skilled workers. Ultimately creating a social class structure, splitting individuals into upper, middle and lower class. Although relating back to society today, this song allows the listener to think about the world without technology and materialistic items. Imagine the knowledge an individual would have about politics, crime and hatred without access to technology. These issues have always been present in society. For better or for worse, people are more aware of them and can voice their views to the public more easily because of materialistic and technological items.

John Lennon hopes that every person will believe in this dream along with him, ending the song with the line, “And the world will be as one”. Lennon wrote this song after returning to his home in New York City after the breakup of The Beatles, where he became involved with radical politics along side Yoko. This soon led to Lennon dealing with a five year battle to stay in the country. Since he was free at the time, and had no band “image” he had to maintain he voiced his opinions on many issues of the day. Lennon wanted to reflect his core beliefs with this song, caring about world peace and happiness above disagreements and material things. He didn’t want to conform to society and the beliefs. He isn’t directly instructing the listener to not conform to societal principles or beliefs, but to just imagine a world where these don’t exist. A world where you can be every individual lives at peace with one another. This song allows the listener to see how attached to their belongings they are, how fixated on being wealthy they are and the impact politics and social norms play in their life. Even after this song was released, difficulties with the American government continued through 1973 which inspired many of his songs in in the *Mind Games* album (Ulster, 2015). *Imagine* wanted to spark a revolution of peace, love and equality, promoting movements beyond all the chaos going on at the time. Little did John Lennon know, this song would forever be an anthem and resonate to the world even today.

Sources

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