

## Unit 4: WHEN THE BEATLES REFUSED TO PLAY BEFORE A SEGREGATED AUDIENCE

The Beatles performed a concert in Florida only once. And they were willing to cancel the Sept. 11, 1964, date at Jacksonville's Gator Bowl when they learned the audience was to be racially segregated.



The policy was in defiance of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964, which was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson that July and banned segregation in public accommodations. For the group, which was heavily influenced by African American music, the idea was anathema, and the four Beatles demanded that black concertgoers sit with their white counterparts. They issued a statement five days before the show that noted, "We will not appear unless Negroes are allowed to sit anywhere."

"We never play to segregated audiences, and we aren't going to start now," John Lennon is quoted as having said at the time. "I'd sooner lose our appearance money." The promoters caved.

"We weren't into prejudice," Paul McCartney said in 1966. "We were always keen on mixed-race audiences. With that being our attitude, shared by all the group, we never wanted to play South Africa or any places where blacks would be separated. It wasn't out of any goody-goody thing. We just thought, 'Why should you separate black people from white? That's stupid, isn't it?'"

From then on, the Beatles demanded integrated audiences upfront. In 2011, a contract from their 1965 show in San Francisco surfaced as part of an auction. One clause reads, "Artists will not be required to perform before a segregated audience."

"We were kind of quite intelligent guys, looking at the political scene and, coming from Liverpool, we played with black bands and black people in the audience," McCartney remembered while doing press for *Eight Days a Week*. "It didn't matter to us."

Dr. Kitty Oliver, a black historian who attended the concert as a teenager, recalled the night in a blog post for the Beatles Story. Unaware that the group had demanded the crowd be integrated, she expected to be seated in a separate section without a good view. Instead, she wrote, "The room chilled as I walked into a sea of white faces. I sat in silence with elbows drawn in tight to make sure I did not accidentally brush an arm and spark an outburst."

### 1) Answer with T (True) or F (False).

- The Beatles' concert in Florida was almost cancelled. T / F
- "...racially segregated" means that black people were not allowed. T / F
- The Civil Rights Act of 1964 allowed black people's access to all public places. T / F
- John Lennon preferred to lose money rather than compromise his principles. T / F
- Paul McCartney's words mean they wanted to set an example. T / F
- After Jacksonville, the Beatles made sure they never faced the same problem. T / F
- Racism seems to have been equally prevalent in Britain at the same time. T / F
- Dr Kitty Oliver felt happy because she could be at the concert. T / F



### 2) Listen to Dr Kitty Oliver, Ringo Star, Paul McCartney and others describe their experience from the concert and fill the gaps. (1-3 words)

- Dr Oliver was \_\_\_\_\_ years old when she attended the concert.
- At the time of the segregation Dr Oliver only knew one white person, a \_\_\_\_\_ who sold products to the black community.
- The Beatles refused to play if there was going to be segregation \_\_\_\_\_.
- The Beatles acted up although they knew their stance would \_\_\_\_\_ a lot of Americans.
- Paul McCartney claims that they all had to \_\_\_\_\_ for any idea to go through.

### 3) Discuss the following.

- Why did Dr Oliver sit "in silence with elbows drawn in tight" during the concert?
- How would you characterize the Beatles attitude to segregation? Use words from ex. 12 on page 60 of your book.
- Have you ever had to stand up and defend someone? How did you feel? What did you risk? Would you do it again?

The Youtube video for this exercise is on this link