

The growth of
teenage culture in the
usa in the period
1955-1975 essay
sample



By the 1950's suburban life in America had become the normal way of life for the majority of the population. Most adults had lived through a world war and a depression. They wanted to lead a stable life without the threat of poverty or death hanging in the air. Suburbia suited them perfectly. However the baby boom after the war had brought lots of new people into the world. People who only knew of the monotonous ways of suburban life.

Their daily routine was the same, their surroundings were the same and there was very little to do apart from sports which, like so much of their lifestyle, fitted into a repetitive cycle, controlled by rules and formalities. For the first time teenagers were being recognised as a social group but their needs were very different from those of older people. They wanted the excitement and uncertainty that had been missing from their lives. Not finding the support they so desperately needed from older generations they started rebelling.

There were three areas of the media which profited from this rebellion. The cinema was a very popular pastime and during the 1950s many films were produced with a rebellious theme. They showed teenagers the life they wanted to lead which was full of danger and excitement. Most of these films followed the same story line. A wild teenage boy would rebel throughout the film but towards the end conform to his parents views and become a responsible citizen. In 1955 a film was released which was not based on this story line.

Called 'Rebel Without A Cause', it starred James Dean, a young actor who was very popular at the time. The film followed the life of Buzz. He was a

middle class teenager who rebelled against his parents and was tragically killed while playing a game of chicken with a friend. The film achieved cult status when Dean himself was killed in a high-speed car crash shortly after the film's release. One other film that promoted rebellious behaviour was 'The Wild One', starring 'Marlon Brando'. When asked what he was rebelling against he replied: "What have you got"?

Implying that he was rebelling against anything. What shocked most parents was the fact that the teenagers who rebelled in these films were middle class. They were supposed to be polite and considerate not wild and uncontrollable. Another area in which teenagers found a rebellious source was music. The first rock music horrified most adults. It had origins in black music and there was still much prejudice towards black Americans. They felt that the lyrics promoted crime and a lawless way of life. Elvis Presley who accompanied his songs with erotic dancing did not help the matter.

The final form of media, which promoted a teen rebellion, was literature. Two writers in particular, Alan Ginsberg and Holden Caulfield, wrote poems attacking suburban life. Parents also disliked Alan Ginsberg because he used drugs. During the 1960's young people also had a cause to fight. America was at war. The government was trying to stop the spread of communism by helping South Vietnam to fight the invading communist North. The fight was harder than the Americans had expected and soon the government started drafting school leavers into the army unless they were going to college.

This meant that poorer families that couldn't afford to send their sons to college had to send them to fight. Draft dodging was one way of avoiding the

fighting but if caught, the penalty was prison. Most teens opposed the drafting of school leavers because they didn't want to fight but also because they felt that America should not be involved at all. They started protesting at university campuses. These protests became stronger and stronger until a protest at Kent State University where students started throwing stones at National Guardsmen.

The Guards opened fire on the crowd, killing four students. A wave of shock crossed America because these students were respectable middle class children. By the mid 60s the rebellion was in full swing. The hippy movement had started. Hippies took drugs, listened to rock music and, helped greatly by the arrival of the pill, had premarital sex with many partners. They followed mystical religions and lived in big communes. San Francisco became the hippie capital of the world. Many hippies were middle class and this horrified the older generations.

Parents thought that their children were ungrateful for the benefits of a safe life, and the children thought that their parents didn't try hard enough to see their point of view. This all culminated to the highest point in the hippy culture, Woodstock. Teenage culture grew a lot in the first few years of its life. The way in which this culture grew was very interesting. While the teenager of the 1950's was rebelling against anything and everything, the teenager of the 60's and 70's was rebelling against matters such as human rights, the use of nuclear weapons and the Vietnam War.