

The social and political context of the 1950's is crucial to any understanding of...

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The social and political context of the 1950's is crucial to any understanding of the birth of rock n roll. " Rock was formed out of the social, economic and political context of post-war America". The social context was on the bases of the post war baby boom, which counted for the birth of 77 million babies between the years 1946-1964. By the year 1964 forty percent of America's population was under twenty years of age. For the first time both middle and working class youths were acquiring an affluent lifestyle. Disposable income came from part-time work and pocket money, which gave youths some form of spending power, which gave them a sense of independence. This mind you were what Wicke's point out was due to America's economic growth and capitalism, which was reinstated in the country. The American governments distrust in politicians as well as other members in different institutions led to the investigation of numerous people and the need for government employees to sign loyalty oaths. America became obsessed with the need to conform in social behaviour, so much so that youths were placed under immense pressure to understand the important value of the American way of life, which was to do well at school. This message was deployed through the bombardment of propaganda campaigns. It was this notion of importance on school that sociologist Coleman describes as being the reason for the segregation of youths from the rest of society by forming a new culture ' teenagers' a group of youths which are of the same age group. This formation was encouraged by the school based activities that they had to participate in. The rules implemented at teenagers were met with rebellious attitude. The ideological view that the government had built around education was seen to be artificial. The notion that a good education would

equip an individual with a good job did not fall through as many teenagers realised. As a result cultural industries saw fit to move in and make profit from this reality by offering a form of escapism through music. Music mainly Rhythm and Blues was expressing the experiences of young teenagers. Teenagers no longer upheld the values and message that their parents and schools were promoting. This created conflict between the cultural industries who were promoting the pleasures of consumption with the traditional view of educational demands. This was seen to be the background formation and experience for rock n roll. It was due to the experiences of teenagers that Rock n roll formed. Rock n roll is due to Presley etc. However the arguments put forward on the notion that the social and political context of the 1950's was the reason behind the emergence of rock n roll is undermined by Peterson who states that the birth of Rock n roll can not be purely based and credited to the individuals mentioned above. That is not to say he is undermining their talent but instead such talent can be found on a wider scale, however only a few make the forefront. The baby boom explanation he says is simple in that in 1954 the oldest ages of the baby boomers were nine years of age and around half were not yet born. He offers an alternative reason for the birth of rock n roll which is found on the bases of six factors, law, technology, industry structure, organisation structure, occupational career and market. The most important determining factors identified by Peterson are the law and technology. The ASCAP controlled the reproduction of music and hence controlled what could and could not be played on radio. As a result the radio networks were tired of these limitations and set up the BMI in the hope to play different forms of music to that what the ASCAP was

traditionally playing. However there was a dispute over the revenues from copyrights. It was to this that Rock n Roll developed a new genre formed two existing genres of music, country music and the most influential was Rhythm and blues. Hence the music was not something new derived in the 1950's instead it was already in existence as the majority of rock n roll songs in the beginning were adopted from black music. Black music had already established the idea of expressing the woes of life experiences. As rock n roll was based on this, this undermines the idea that the genre of music emerged due to the problems that youngster's felt they encountered. The introduction of television meant that owners of radio as well as programmes moved on to the screen, this left the radio with a lot of available time slots which needed to be filled in, this concurred at the same time that imported Japanese portable radios were cheaply and readily available. The remaining factors were due to major record labels ignoring the new genre of music and hence as a result the independents moved in and catered for the ever-growing diverse teenage segment.