

Free research paper about british youth culture after wwii

[Countries](#), [England](#)



The end of World War II brought with it varied changes in British youth culture and society. Britain witnessed unprecedented levels of population growth during this period. The population growth was accompanied by social and political movements that set to change the old ways British people looked at their culture and society. This paper seeks to analyze the changes in British youth culture after the end of World War II. The paper is divided into three distinct periods of time from the 'affluent society' of the 1950s to the present day youth culture. My cultures and subcultures emerged out of Britain and these include the Mods, Rockers and Teddy Boys. They managed to share their new developed beliefs, values and attitudes which greatly affected the function of society target more the Mods, Rockers and Teddy Boys, how they were formed and how parents of young people who were part of these groups acted and reacted to changes in their children's cultural behavior.

In post-World War II Britain, there were concerns about changes brought about the destruction of war. What emerged in terms of youth culture was totally unique and revolutionary. Hall and Jefferson observe that what emerged out of post war Britain were debates on 'affluence'- the rise in consumer working class spending that advanced the idea that working class people not only could spend but lived better lives (95). There were also debates on 'consensus' which was the acceptance of dominant political entities and the mix economy of free market and more social protections. The third salient feature was 'embourgeoisement' which was a creation of a new distinct class. It is under this backdrop that the Teddy Boys, Mods and the Rockers emerged (Hall and Jefferson, 95).

According to Cohen, before World War II, individuals who were above 20 years old had the majority of spending power in Britain (210). The Mods and Rockers did not emerge in Britain out of the self-conscious need at isolating themselves from the dominant cultures of the post war period. However, economic and demographic changes of the first decade post World War II created grounds on which young people ended up fighting for a new identity and recognition citing alienation from the economy and society. During this period the number of unmarried teens increased (MacInnes 3). These teens also witnessed economic changes that saw their wages increase more than twofold than the rate of wage increase in adults. Changes in economic fortune meant there was economic emancipation of a group that barely had responsibilities or social obligations. The youth that emerged in this economic and social change were young people who participated fully in the production of commodities and whose consumption ways were disparate from those of the working class family. Out of this new unique social group emerged distinct styles that were associated with deviance and was publicly avowed. Mainstream British society frowned upon his group and rejected its values and beliefs.

Cohen cites the Teddy Boys as the initial group to experiment with a new subculture (204). Their style was composed of defiance and anger and the need to separate from the rest of mainstream society. Cohen notes that there was societal confusion when it came to the behavior and style of this new emerging youth culture. These young people were called Hot-blooded Youth, their behavior was a sign of the times and it was a result of affluence of the early years post World War II. The confusion and the failure to

articulate of the youth culture was a result of misguided assumption that teenage culture was homogeneous and that deviance was a norm. It was not seen as a movement towards a new youth culture. Cohen believes that this particular categorization and judgment of youths is misleading. It has the effect of ignoring how adults give the excuse of adolescence and teenage behavior to downplay real conflict and antagonism in society (Matza and Sykes 713). British teenagers despite their experimentation with subcultures were seen as individuals just struggling with the idea of breaking into adult life.

The Teddy Boys style is argued to have been expressed more clearly by musical groups such as the Rolling Stones and the Who. This was a group of working class young people with per chance for American rock and roll (Covey 80). Theirs was the first attempt at youth self-creation and it was a successful attempt. The creation is argued not to be a reaction or revolt against adults in British society but a reaction more to the environment and what it had to offer like cafes and pop culture. The Teddy Boys inherited their style from the Edwardian Dandy. The Teddy Boys however were simple in their representation and outlook despite the sophistication they tried to create with their dressing. Below is a picture of the Teddy Boys:

The essence of the Teddy Boys look was a unique fashion style. Their look emerged out of the attempt by the shop-owners of Saville Row to reinvent the dandy look. It is argued that the Teddy Boys were an extremely narcissistic group. They never really participated in violent activities except in cases where their dressing style was mocked and they had to react.

Violence that emerged associated with Teddy Boys was related to an over-

reaction to insults about their mode of dress. They really didn't take lightly the insult that they were 'flash cunt'.

The Teddy Boys with their South London traditional working class style gave way to the Mods in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The modes are said to have made a conscious attempt at appearing new and unique. The term Mod is derived from the word modern. The Mods were argued to be sharp and confident and they adopted an 'Italianite' style of dressing. They more into blues music rather than rock. Their preference for music was jazz, Jamaican reggae music, and Black American rhythm and blues (Perone 3). They are said to have inherited the "vanity, confidence and fussiness" of the Teddy Boys (Cohen 209). They also emerged at a time youth culture was undergoing a huge transformation and a lot of new youth groups emerged with disparate types of style. The Mods are argued to have reached their peak in the year 1963. The Mods were argued to have been interested mainly in music, their appearance, alcohol and drugs (Covey 80). Below is a picture of the Mods:

After the Mods, came the Rockers who were a transformed version of the Teddy Boys. They were argued to be lumpen, outgoing and direct. The Mods detested the fact that the Teds became too respectable so they adopted a new style to suit their new perspective and subculture of rock, leather and motor bikes. They followed the style of American motorcycle gangs (Perone 2). Their taste in music was that of musicians like Elvis Presley and Eddie Cochran. Below is a picture of the Rockers:

Developments and changes in youth cultures and subcultures also brought with antagonism between groups. Marked differences between the Mods and

the Rockers meant a clash of cultures and in the end physical confrontation was inevitable. As one scholar notes below;

' Mod' meant effeminate, stuck-up, emulating the middle classes, aspiring to a competitive sophistication, snobbish, phony. ' Rocker' meant hopelessly naïve, loutish, scruffy and above all betraying: for the mods . . . wanted a good image for the rebel group, the polished sharp image that would offset the adult patronization by which this increasingly self-aware world of the adolescent might be disarmed. (Cohen 211).

In 1964, there were riots in Brighton that involved more than 1000 teenagers. The fight was between the Mods and the Rockers. Out of these differences emerged a fight for control of the British cultural scene, a fight that the Mods ended up winning because of their ability for commercial exploitation. Besides the changes in culture was also a reaction of authority and adults to the youth culture. Cohen considers the adult reaction as moral panic. Adults were unsure of ways to deal with all these marked developments in youth culture. The public began to see youth behavior as evil that warranted no great attention but had to be monitored.

British youth culture went through a remarkable transformation at the end of World War II. British youth became to experiment with dressing, music and cultural lifestyles. Out of these different lifestyles emerged a number of groups that seek to portray a new Britain. The Teddy Boys, the Mods and the Rockers are a few of the youth subcultures that dominated the British cultural scene. They brought with them a new attitude to life and existence. They all borrowed from other cultures like the American Rock and Roll and African American rhythm scenes to create a distinct British culture that was

frowned upon by adults but was seen as revolutionary by the youth. The affluence of the 1950s and 1960s enabled young people from both working and middle class to create new unique youth cultures. Even though the cultures and subculture were judged to be evil by adults they had the effect of transforming British culture even though it also had the negative effects of drug and alcohol abuse and participation in gangs related to the youth subcultures.

Works Cited

Cohen, Stanley. *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*. New

York: Routledge, 2002.

Covey, Herbert. C. *Street Gangs Throughout the World*. Charles C Thomas Publisher, 2010

Hall, S. and Jefferson, T. *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*.

Routledge, 2006.

MacInnes, C. *England, Half English: A Polyphoto of the Fifties*.

Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966.

Matza, D. and Sykes, G. 'Juvenile Delinquency and Subterranean Values', *American*

Sociological Review 26 (October 1961), pp. 712-19

Perone, James. E. *Mods, Rockers, and the Music of the British Invasion*. ABC-CLIO, 2009.

"Fashions of the 1960's - Mods, Hippies, and the Youth Culture." Hubpages,

26 Nov. 2014. Web 23 Jun. 2015.

“ 1964: Mods and Rockers jailed after seaside riots.” BBC. Web 23 Jun. 2015.