

Film comparison: the  
blackboard jungle v.s.  
rock 'n' roll high  
school essay sampl...



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

*The Blackboard Jungle* and *Rock ' n' Roll High School* are two films that both embody the social awareness inherent in the genre of male mellow drama. These films have a very significant influence on the trans-generational depiction of adolescence in film. This can most apparently be seen with such films as *Beach Blanket Bingo* , *To Sir with Love* , *Ferris Buhler's Day Off* , *The Breakfast Club*, *Dazed & Confused* . All of these films represent the experiences endured by all adolescents, while at the same time uniquely defining the specifics of their generation through the music associated with the time.

By epitomizing the ideals adopted by each generation, and collaborating them with the music of each era, this films gain historical value. In fact, this is a significance that is so historically relevant that these films increases in acclaim overtime, and often the fashion and music outshines the film quality or technique. It is this author's view that *The Blackboard Jungle* initiated what can be identified as a sub-genre of mellow drama in cinema, one that would best be labeled as *juvenile mellow drama* , or *high school drama* ; this genre largely relies on the rebellious nature of riotous youth and the transcending belief of authorities that there is a need for society to tame them. The Blackboard Jungle and Rock ' n' Roll High School represent the epitome of this juvenile-delinquent mellow-drama genre.

In this new genre started by *The Blackboard Jungle* the cinema techniques are slightly more abstract than those one might find in another film. There short-cut and frequently placed frames sequenced together to relay action, and this is beautifully done, but many scenes are shot in relation to the music playing on the screen. This is most likely done because in films like <https://assignbuster.com/film-comparison-the-blackboard-jungle-vs-rock-n-roll-high-school-essay-sample/>

these the music plays just as big if not a bigger role in telling the story than the actors themselves. One thing that is unique of *The Blackboard Jungle* that is not often utilized in the films it inspired is the film's use of silence. There are many scenes in *The Blackboard Jungle* that play no different on screen than any other classic films. The only difference between this film and the others is that this film is more immediately connected with the most current trends and music young people. The film also contains a social edge in the fact that it is politically and socially relevant to the time.

In 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled that segregated education was unconstitutional. In 1963, it was found in the case of *Jackson v. the Pasadena City School District* that Pasadena manipulated school boundaries in order to maintain racial segregation at Washington Junior High.

Washington Junior High was located in a *neutral zone*, many white parents started moving their children out of the school in the early 1940's. The result of this was a shift from a 10 percent black population in 1946, to 52 percent in 1958, and then 84 percent in 1964. *Jackson v. the Pasadena City School District* marked the courts awareness of this overlooked segregation in the school system. It was this very conflict in Pasadena which *The Blackboard Jungle* set out to depict.

In August 1955, the U. S. Ambassador to Italy Clare Boothe Luce protested with the Venice Film Festival to withdraw *The Blackboard Jungle* from the event. Luce's opposition to the film was based on the fact that she felt the film did not accurately depict education in the United States. She stated that she would not attend the festival if the film was played. It was Luce's fear that communists in Italy would try to use the film as fuel for an ant-America

<https://assignbuster.com/film-comparison-the-blackboard-jungle-vs-rock-n-roll-high-school-essay-sample/>

campaign, and presence at the festival would constitute her belief in its social credibility. In the United States, MGM film producers argued against Luce's censorship, but the U. S. State department agreed with Luce and pulled the film. Despite this, the film still managed to make its mark on society. American audiences found its dramatic depiction of violence and the threat thereof for perfect conflict within the film. This drew audiences to the picture, while at the same time it drew attention to a seriously overlooked socioeconomic problem in inner city schools.

Never before had this class of deprived individuals been given as realistic of a representation in American cinema, and it served as a critique on the American government's school system. Though this film was widely characterized by contemporaries as being an unrealistic depiction of the educational system in the 1950's, it still influenced popular cultures perception of school system. Adam Benjamin Golub argues that *The Blackboard Jungle* just represented one of the growing postwar gaps in communication between teens and their parents (Golub, 103). He points out that, *the film reportedly inspired young people to dance in the aisles to its rock 'n' roll soundtrack, even as it allegedly inspired acts of juvenile delinquency that shocked parents across the country* (Golub, 103). This created a fear in the general public of the threat of violence, while at the same time it instigated and incited rebellious actions on the behalf of adolescents against authority. The legal opposition to the film posed by Luce and the State Department warrants the film consideration as a rebellious act against the status quo, just as much so as the generation the film represents.

The most significant aspect of the melodrama is the melody involved. The music that these films use is symbolic of the generation in which they are made. This gives *Blackboard Jungle* and *Rock ' n' Roll High School* a historical value within both the musical and cinematic history of America. They also make a statement about the current state of the American school system. Whether this is done through an authentic depiction of current conditions or not, these films hold cultural relevance in the sense that they shape popular culture and often define the more common perception of American adolescent youth. It is almost as if the high school melodrama promoting youthful rebellion against authority has become a cultural cliché, but *Blackboard Jungle* and *Rock ' n' Roll High School* are historical marks the spark of two equally important cultural revolutions in America.

*The Blackboard Jungle* is credited with sparking the Rock and Roll revolution for its popularizing Bill Haley and the Comets's song *Rock Around the Clock*. When the song would play at the theater, young teens were said to have danced wildly through the movie isles. The central band of *the Rock ' n' Roll High School* is the Ramones, who in the family of Rock ' n' Roll represent the emergence of punk music, specifically in the states. In 1979, when the film was released Rock and Roll, along with teen movies that embody the music of the times were both a traditionally exploited within film. Roger Corman's *Rock ' n' Roll High School* captured the new wave of rebellion inherent in punk music. The plot of the film is very simple.

The story revolves around high school teenager Riff Randell, played by P. J. Soles. The film follows her on her journey to meet the Ramones and possibly convince them to sing one of her many self-composed lyrics. When the <https://assignbuster.com/film-comparison-the-blackboard-jungle-vs-rock-n-roll-high-school-essay-sample/>

school is overrun by the students, the Ramones are proclaimed honorary students at the school. It's this moment, when Joey Ramone gives his signature line of the film *Things sure have changed since we got kicked out of high school*. This line is symbolic of the rebellious and edgy nature of the punk movement, while at the same time it relays the underlying message that the state of high school is an ever changing process. This can be seen in how the things used to define the students' ideology in *Blackboard Jungle* is far apart from the fads depicted in *Rock 'n' Roll High School* to imply the same ideals. Where neither film differs is in the theme of adolescent rebellion verses authority.

The understanding in iconic value which both films demonstrate can be seen in the teen craze they inspire. The thing about *Rock 'n' Roll High School* that stands out above all else that many fail to notice is the extent to which it plays like a Bizarro World version of *Grease*, and I think it's probably significant that both movies were released in the same year. Nearly all of the same elements are on display, except where *Grease* promotes the idealized 50's that never existed, the Ramones play on the ironies of their day. This is where the iconic status of the Ramones lie and this is also where the films colt appeals stems from. In an interview with *The Danforth Review*, Andrew Titus describes his infatuation with the Ramones.

When I was 14, it was 1984 and that was the time when Heavy Metal was on the radio and bands like Twisted Sister were actually making a name for themselves. I fell into that but very quickly came around to hardcore and punk rock by attending shows here in Fredericton. My initiation was through

The Ramones...[They] represent youthfulness in punk rock where The Sex  
<https://assignbuster.com/film-comparison-the-blackboard-jungle-vs-rock-n-roll-high-school-essay-sample/>

Pistols represent anger. That youthful, exuberant, fun-loving rebellion is where The Ramones come in. (Titus, 2007)

The conflict that both films depict arising between the young and the old, or youth and authority, is the direct reaction to the condemnation of iconic figures the adolescent students lead to chaos. This can be seen in Rock 'n' Roll High School in the final climatic scene when the students evacuate the school into the parking lot. They behave with the same riotous chaotic passion that is expressed in their music and the seen is reminiscent of the French revolution, and their uprisings were within right. Though rebellious outcry of the Ramones and the Sex Pistols were seen as random acts of chaos, there was a method to their madness. And even still, if it were not for the liberating qualities of the 50's rock, punk music would not exist.

Pierre Bourdieu is a highly respected French sociologist. Of all of his beliefs, his most popular is his assertion that the public does not exist (1984). This concept is addressed in his book, Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste, when he points out there is a difference of class taste between the ruling class and popular culture. But, within this conflict, there is no public, only a media mediating between the two and a culture to which they often cater to do so. Bourdieu feels that in this field of power struggle, the ruling class uses their *cultural capital* to assert their *distinction* (1984). This is seen in the way politicians might only use terms understandable to the elite of society. This separation between popular culture and the elite culture of a society makes it virtually impossible for government officials to ever get the unanimous appeal for which they often aspire. Most political elites view popular cultures' apathy towards politics

<https://assignbuster.com/film-comparison-the-blackboard-jungle-vs-rock-n-roll-high-school-essay-sample/>

with great disdain. Even still, they relentlessly attempt to relate to young voters, whom they know will support them. This vague relationship between the youth and authority open rock and roll music up for the celebratory riot inducing nature of punk music.

Celebratory riots are often referred to as spectator aggression, which, as defined by the NCAA, means *behavior that intends to destroy property or injure another person, or is grounded in a total disregard for the well-being of self or others* (NCAA Report, 2003, p. 2). In laymen's, a celebratory riot is a wide range or chain of events that include a large number of people acting in a way that threatens the personal safety of others and property. This is usually very chaotic, violent, dangerous behavior that results in many injuries, much damage and arrests. They also usually happen after planned events, more often than not after sports events (University of New Hampshire Student Summary, 2003).

The goal of many University task forces is to formulate the best possible method of preventing these types of riots from happening. The expectation of celebratory gatherings can be identified through the unwelcome changes adopted by the surrounding U Mass community. These changes, that are recognizable in many cities known for this behavior, include local businesses adding iron gates and closing window service for fear of damage to their property. They also alienate the alumni and university from the community, or sense thereof. The riots also breakdown the civility for the near by residents, adding destruction to the property, in a way that appears to be continual and preexistent. Celebratory riots are synonymous with punk music. The same way *Blackboard Jungle* distilled an administrative fear in <https://assignbuster.com/film-comparison-the-blackboard-jungle-vs-rock-n-roll-high-school-essay-sample/>



popular culture towards low income high school students, the Ramones made it commercially acceptable to perform acts of chaos. The inclination towards this type of behavior is in the large part an aspect of the youth in society today.

In sum, these films represent the core ideals of their corresponding generations. Today, if one were to think of people rioting in the street to *Rock Around the Clock* by Bill Haley and the Comets, they might find it too hilarious to take seriously. While, there is still a mild admiration for the Ramones with the contemporary youth, 50's music is viewed as the music of the elderly; and yet, during their adolescent days *Rock Around the Clock* was a song that incited riots. Very often these two films take on the responsibility of personifying the exact emotion expressed by the corresponding music. An example of this is in the last sequence of *Rock 'n' Roll High School* where the scene could ideally be labeled as an authentic cinematic interpretation of punk rock culture. The significance of these films lie in their influence on the history of Rock and Roll music, one of the most influential ideologies in American history to date. In western society the impact of Rock 'n' Roll music is equal to that of Christ, to understand this, is to put the importance of both of these films into perspective.

#### Work Cited

"Blackboard Jungle." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 9 Apr 2007, 02: 29 UTC. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 24 Apr 2007 < [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Blackboard\\_Jungle&oldid=121328222](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Blackboard_Jungle&oldid=121328222) >.

<https://assignbuster.com/film-comparison-the-blackboard-jungle-vs-rock-n-roll-high-school-essay-sample/>

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.  
(1984)

“ Into the Blackboard Jungle: Educational Debate and Cultural Change in  
1950s America” Golub, Adam Benjamin. The University of Texas, Austin.  
(2004)

“ NCAA Releases The Report Of Sportsmanship And Fan Behavior Summit,”  
(September  
16, 2003). Retrieved January 31, 2005 from <http://www.ncaa.org/index1.html>.

Sherman, Craig. Take Three: classic Corman film, examined. Arts-Editor July  
2001.