

Life was difficult in Britain in the immediate post-war period, food rationing continued until 1954, and Britain was gripped by Austerity, as governments struggled to export British goods to earn the foreign currency to pay off the international that had been accrued during the war. After the mid-point of the 1950s things began to improve quite rapidly and in 1957 the Conservative Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan declared: 'most of our people have never had it so good'.

Despite the prosperity of the post-war boom, Britain, America and Western Europe in general experienced a new social divide - between the generations. In the 1960s this divide would, for a significant minority of young people, take a political form.

### Tasks

1. What explanations for this generational divide are provided in extracts 1 - 5?
2. How convincing do you find these explanations?
3. Are there any other contextual reasons for this separation?
4. What political concerns are evident in extracts 6 - 10?
5. Do these extracts provide convincing reasons for the political discontent of materially prosperous Western youth?

#### **Extract 1:** J. Nuttall *Bomb Culture* (1970)

At the point of dropping bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki the generations became divided in a very crucial way ... The people who had not yet reached puberty ... were incapable of conceiving of life with a future ... the so-called 'generation gap' started then and has been increasing ever since.

#### **Extract 2:** *London Evening News* (12 May 1954)

(Teddy Boys are) ... all of unsound mind in the sense that they are all suffering from a form of psychosis. Apart from the birch or the rope, depending upon the gravity of their crimes, what they need is rehabilitation in a psychopathic institution.

#### **Extract 3:** Dick Hebdige 'The Meaning of Mod' from S. Hall & A. Jefferson *Resistance through Rituals: youth subcultures in post-war Britain* (London, 1976)

The average Mod, according to the survey of the 43 Margate offenders ... earned about £11.00 a week, was either a semi-skilled or more typically an office worker who had left secondary-modern school at fifteen. Another large section of mods were employed as department store clerks, messengers, and occupied menial positions in the various service industries of the West end.'

#### **Extract 4:** Alan Sillitoe *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958)

... it's no use saving your money year after year. A mug's game, since the value of it got less and in any case you never knew when the Yanks were going to do something daft like dropping the H-bomb on Moscow.

**Extract 5:** Arthur Marwick *British Society Since 1945* (London, 1987)

Between 1955 and 1960 retail prices rose by 15%; by 1969 they were 63% higher than in 1955. But against that, weekly wage rates rose 25% between 1955 and 1960, and had risen by 88% in 1969.'

**Extract 6:** Rainer Werner Fassbinder quoted in A. Mombauer, 'West German Cinema since 1945' *European Cinema* (2003). Fassbinder was a socially critical West German film director.

I would say that in 1945, at the end of the war, the chances which existed for Germany to renew itself were not realised. Instead the old structures and values, on which our state rests, now as a democracy, have basically remained the same.

**Extract 7:** Eric Hobsbawm, 'Capitalism's Discontents' *Black Dwarf* (1 June 1968)

The students rebelling against a society which offers them all its prizes, the workers forgetting about their HP [hire-purchase] debts to establish by their spontaneous mass action, that life is more than overtime earnings and holidays in Palma: these are not French but potentially international phenomena.

We knew - though the politicians didn't - that people are not contented. They feel that their lives are meaningless in the consumer society. They know that, even when they are comfortable (which many of them are not) they are also more powerless than before, more pushed around by giant organisations for whom they are items and not men.

They know that the official mechanisms for representing them - elections, parties, etc. - have tended to become a set of ceremonial institutions going through empty rituals. They do not like it - but until recently they did not know what to do about it, and may have wondered whether there was anything that they could do about it. What France proves is that when someone demonstrates that people are not powerless, they may begin to act again. Perhaps even more than this: that only the sense of impotence is holding many of us back from acting like men and not zombies.

**Extract 8:** Ernest Mandel *The Changing Role of the Bourgeois University* (1970)

Thus a process is underway of proletarianization of intellectual labor. Proletarianization does not mean primarily (or in some cases circumstances at all) limited consumption or a low standard of living, but increasing alienation, increased subordination of labor to demands that no longer have any correspondence to the special talents of fulfilment of the inner needs of men.'

**Extract 9:** Herbert Marcuse *One Dimensional Man* (1964)

To the degree to which freedom from want, the concrete substance of all freedom, is becoming a real possibility, the liberties which pertain to a state of lower productivity are losing their former content. Independence of thought, autonomy, and the right to political opposition are being deprived of their basic critical function in a society which seems increasingly capable of satisfying the needs of the Individuals through the way in which it is organized. Such a society may justly demand acceptance of its principles and institutions, and reduce the opposition to the discussion and promotion of alternative policies within the status quo. In this respect, it seems to make little difference whether the increasing satisfaction of needs is accomplished by an authoritarian or a non-authoritarian system. Under the conditions of a rising standard of living, non-conformity with the system itself appears to be socially useless, and the more so when it entails tangible economic and political disadvantages and threatens the smooth operation of the whole. Indeed, at least in so far as the necessities of life are involved, there seems to be no reason why the production and distribution of goods and services should proceed through the competitive concurrence of individual liberties.

**Extract 10:** extract from the song 'I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag' by Country Joe and the Fish (1965)

Yeah, come on all of you, big strong men,  
Uncle Sam needs your help again.  
He's got himself in a terrible jam  
Way down yonder in Vietnam  
So put down your books and pick up a gun,  
We're gonna have a whole lotta fun.

And it's one, two, three,  
What are we fighting for?  
Don't ask me, I don't give a damn,  
Next stop is Vietnam;  
And it's five, six, seven,  
Open up the pearly gates,  
Well there ain't no time to wonder why,  
Whoopee! we're all gonna die.

Listen to the whole song on youtube: [youtube.com/watch?v=3W7-ngmO\\_p8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3W7-ngmO_p8)