The Making of Modern Britain 1951-2007

Social change 1951-1964

Society in 1951

Britain in 1950's still country moulded by WW2.

Still widespread visible signs of war damage, national service, regional and class loyalties still strong. Class and geographical attitudes were reinforced by films of the time.

However, British society 1951 not static or frozen in time > war had caused significant social change, as had the welfare state.

The Festival of Britain 1951 showed people that they were on the verge of a new, modern world and in the years to 1964 there would be significant social shifts, population changes and growing social tensions.

Pressures on Society

- Immigration – inward and outward, Notting Hill Riots, political party confusion as to how to legislate immigration
- Demographic changes – increases in population, immigration, differences between the towns and countryside, social mobility - drain of population from key areas (hollowing out of city centres)
- Pressures on Britain's infrastructure – housing
- Criminality – increase in crime and changes in attitude towards criminals
- Hooliganism and violence – riots and radicalisation of youth e.g Mods and Rockers, Brighton and Margate
- Class tensions within the education system in tandem with the opening up of opportunities
- Changing attitudes towards class – rejection and challenging of the Establishment, decreasing deference towards authority, satire boom
- Changes in culture and the media – drive to break down censorship and social taboos, satire, dispersion of ideas via media

Demographic change 1951-1964

Three key factors created demographic change in the UK.

- Health and Life expectancy. Birth rates out stripped death rates, medical improvements were seen under the welfare state.

- Inward Migration. Continuing influx of immigrants from Irish Republic > 1948, 250,000 arrived. Although many countries sent immigrants to the UK, we also lost many as there was a steady flow of immigrants to North America and Australia. 1950's Britain received 676,000 immigrants but lost 1.32 million people. In the 1960's the inward migration was 1.25 million but outward, 1.92 million.

- The difference between town and country was now much sharper. Countryside still dominated by agriculture. Rural areas had not yet been threatened by creeping urbanisation that is eventually seen. Most people lived in strong, small communities. This situation was about to change > mass car ownership and social mobility, people began to move away from city centres.

Immigration

Where were the Immigrants mainly coming from?
West Indies
India and Pakistan
West Africa
Cyprus
Others

Push factors
Restrictions imposed from the US in 1952 led many to come to Britain.
Economic problems at home such as high unemployment.

Pull factors
There was a romantic and glamorised image of Britain from the people of the colonies.
Britain was seen as their "mother country."
Jobs were readily available in Britain.
The arrival of the ship "Empire Windrush" brought a new wave of Afro-Carribbean immigration into Britain.

Immigration – Arguments to restrict

- Overcrowding - Britain already had the highest population density in the world.
- There would be trouble if the economy went back into recession due to the lack of jobs available - Voucher system (proposed by the Immigration Act of 1962) could regulate the inflow of people to match job vacancies.
- There were growing tensions between the white and black immigrants, so restricting immigration could prevent the situation from growing worse. (Riots did actually start between young white males and black residents in places such as Notting Hill, Nottingham and poorer areas of London. The Salmon report gave a few reasons for the underlying reasons for the break out such as: the anger that the blacks were working for low wages, bitterness at the rise of rents - which was blamed on the blacks - and the "teddy boys" playing local heroes by using violence to reduce the number of black residents.)
- Immigrants would only settle in certain towns and large cities as a group which caused even more overcrowding - government had to move them but then the Immigrants were accused of being "queue jumping" council house waiting lists, creating more tension. This also did not help the immigrants to mingle with the white people.
- Immigrants claimed to be making unreasonable demands on the welfare state and made no contribution to the welfare funds.
- People argued that there was no need to introduce racial problems to Britain as people were already and always will be prejudiced, so Immigration should be restricted.
- Commonwealth was part of Britain's past therefore Britain should be concentrating on building a relationship between the US and countries around Europe instead of pleasing the people of the Commonwealth.

Immigration – Arguments to allow

- Free entry had not produced the problem of overcrowding in the past, so will not pose a problem now.
- Relationship between jobs and availability of jobs was self regulating - if the number of jobs available falls, then the number of immigrants coming to Britain will fall too and vice versa.
- Social tensions were not excessive - the government should punish the wrongdoers individually.
- There was no evidence that the immigrants were making no contributions to the welfare state or making unreasonable demands - in fact they were helping to run the national services and even made a massive contribution to the Second World War, which some people were quick to forget.
- The immigrants scarcely complained about where they lived - the solution to overcrowding was to build more and better housing.
- People would grow out of being prejudiced in time - they should be encouraged to be friendly with the Immigrants and allow multi-cultural societies to be welcomed in Britain.
- Should not hinder the relationship with the Commonwealth as they were clearly still loyal to Britain.

Infrastructure

Britain's infrastructure was badly run down, desperate need for housing to replace war damaged ones. 1951 > Conservative government set ambitious target of building 300,000 new homes every year > local government spent millions on clearing pre-war slums and building new towns such as Harlow and Kirby.

Effect of migration: What people did not appreciate was that inner cities had changed forever. Inner cities now found themselves separated from the suburbs by ring of dereliction. Mass ownership of car changed attitudes to road building, distances to work and holidays = inner cities began to die.
Cars > Construction of M1 between London and Birmingham began 1958> work on M6 after. 1957-1963 1,200 miles new roads or upgraded main roads completed = Roads were in railways were out.
Demise of railways > Beeching Report 1963 recommended closure of more than 30% of rail network. Argued road offered a cheaper and more flexible alternative > small branch lines and stations serving small communities were gone. Remains a matter of controversy between Romantics and Realists. Whichever is right, it cut off many rural areas and affected real social change

Violence, Crime and Hooliganism

Immigration > public anxieties were often aroused by unfair and inaccurate reports of criminal behaviour by immigrants.

But! This violent crime was mostly home grown

▢Mid 1950's Teddy Boys had become part of social fabric

▢Previous norms of law abiding behaviour were breaking down

1950 total offences: 461,400   1955 total offences: 1,133,900

Kray Twins: empire of clubs and 'property development'. Outwardly respectable – associated with celebrities. Despite peak in criminal behaviour 1964 > REFLECTED THE CHANGING ATTITUDES TO CRIME AMONG SOME SECTIONS OF SOCIETY

Mods and Rockers: Not organised criminals. Result of new, aggressive youth culture – disrespectful of authority, fight culture.

Young men fighting in the street was hardly new:

▢usual scene on a Saturday night

▢1960's saw rise of football hooliganism (football grounds and vandalising trains)

Due to their emphasis on _style_ that attracted a lot of attention - clashes in early 1960's > Clacton, Margate and Brighton May 1964.

Violence, Crime and Hooliganism

Search for answers:

MORAL PANIC reaction from the public.

Politicians, churchmen and the media went OTT - tried to convey images of knife wielding hooligans undermining the foundations of society.

Exaggeration!

<u>Why did this occur?</u>
Why was this occurring during a time of affluence and personal prosperity?
Why did it occur during a time of national service (supposed to instil discipline)?
=   Britain had to get slowly accustomed to the emergence of a youth culture

Deference (also called submission or passivity) is the condition of submitting to the espoused, legitimate influence of one's superior or superiors. **Deference** implies a yielding or submitting to the judgment of a recognized superior out of respect or reverence.

Education and Class

11+ and Butler Act 1944 - Decided whether a child's education would be in a grammar school (30%) or a secondary modern (60%). Aimed to produce a 'tripartite system' giving equal status to grammar schools, technical schools and secondary moderns – never materialised in practice. Only handful of technical schools were established and secondary moderns came to be quickly regarded as receptacles for children who failed the eleven plus.
Problems >Middle class upset, many saw the test as unfair and inefficient, waste of talent and human potential? Psychological strain on students and parents.
Rowe argues that society in 1951 was deferential and conformist - ingrained respect for authority, class distinctions obvious – dress, speech and class loyalties strong within parties.

How did attitudes change?
Gradual breakdown of old social restrictions and a loss of defence
Suez crisis 1956 exposed blatant lying and manipulation by the government
Rise of CND encouraged the tendency to challenge authority
New trends in culture and the media opened the way for a more individualist and less conformist society, less willing to follow the **'Establishment'** >
Importance of background and connections

Profumo

- Profumo affair: Macmillan's defence minister, John Profumo, had an affair with a prostitute who had links to a man in the Russian military. He talked about Britain's defence to her who would, in turn, tell her Russian friend. Profumo ended up lying to Parliament to cover it up but they found out anyway. This made the Conservatives look bad in the eyes of the public.

- Satire boom of 1960's – dramatic deference to authority. Profumo Affair symbolises shifting attitude towards class and privilege. Barometer of social change, suggested that Britain was becoming less deferential, and less class-ridden society.
- Significance:
- Ideal excuse for press to go after every detail
- Press became less deferential, more intrusive > previous tactics used by government to prevent publication of sensitive or embarrassing information no longer worked
- Booker – "after years of uneasy indulgence, the people were restless and dissatisfied...wild rumours of strange and wild happenings in the country villas, of orgies and philandering.....brought the capital into a frenzy of speculation and contempt aroused by the Government in the hearts of the great mass of the people"

Culture and the Media

Simmering social tensions reflected in the media and culture.
> 1950's deference prevailed and cosy/reassuring TV from BBC and ITV (1955+), e.g. *The Archers*, films such as *The Cruel Sea*,   > reinforced existing attitudes to class (although cinema going into decline due to TV) > 1960's culture began to reflect current society with gang violence (*A Clockwork Orange*), alienation of young working class males (*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*), racial tension (*Sapphire*) and gritty realism of towns (e.g. Merseyside shown in *Z Cars*).

- Drive to break down censorship and social taboos e.g. homosexuality, Lady Chatterley's Lover court case under Obscenity Act.
- Rise of satire – mix of scandalizing the nation and delighting the other half.

Middle class backlash against new 'immorality and depravity' led by prig Mary Whitehouse and parts of national press.
On whole, majority opinion in Britain was socially conservative and remained in same old groove > class system may have been dented by the shifts in social attitudes but it certainly was not broken.

Growth of a Youth subculture

- Growing affluence of society enabled some young people on good wages to feel independent and ready to ignore traditional ways.
- Pockets of poverty did not share in the general prosperity - felt bitter and alienated.
- Teenagers of the 1960's were the first generation to not have lived through the hardships and depression of WWII.
- Advertisers targeted teenagers - sold them clothes, pop records and encouraged them to regard themselves as special and different.
- Psychologically, the young were throwing off traditional restraints and act out their feelings and desires.
- Britain was seen as "grey" and "backwards" - teenagers wanted more excitement in their lives.
- Scandals from the Establishment (e.g. the Profumo affair) hardly set an example of responsible behaviour.
- Boom time for satire - regular mocking on TV and theatre of politicians, deference was crumbling as a result.
- Population boom - more young people around than before.
- Affluent society - teenagers had more money and time (as working hours declined) to spend in café's and jazz clubs.
- Music became a massive influence on teenagers - pop and rock and roll was first introduced.
- Sexual liberation - legalisation of homosexuality, availability of the pill, explicit books were accepted.

Was there a Social Revolution? Yes...

- Subcultures opposed to established society were developing e.g.: Mods, Rockers, Teddy Boys.
- Emergence of youth culture.
- An outburst of individualism.
- Greater freedoms in fashion and self-expression.
- Technological advances - TVs, Cars, Air travel etc.
- Growth of "world news" and international media images.
- Greater affluence and availability of credit.
- Improvements in material life and the "consumer society."
- Upheavals in immigration and class.
- Sexual liberation - the pill was available for the first time, homosexuality was legalised, first explicit book was published.
- There was changes in where people lived and transport systems.
- Major changes in education and secondary school development.
- "Conservative backlash" from the older generation.

Was there a Social Revolution? No...

Social change ebbs and flows - society is always changing.

Social change in the 1960's didn't effect everyone - depended on age, class and region of living.

The changes didn't last.

Middle classes instigated a backlash at the changes made - "class system was dented, but not broken."

Most people resisted a lot of the changes.