



## The Teddy Boy as Scapegoat (TeddyBoy als Opferlamm)

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## The Teddy Boy as Scapegoat

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**Abstract:** Since the mid-1950s Britain has witnessed the emergence of various youth subcultures. The earliest of these youth cults to appear, in 1954 in certain working-class districts of London, were the so-called Teddy Boys. These first teenagers were visible not only on account of their outrageous 'Edwardian' costumes but also their delinquent and sometimes violent behaviour. They were proud of belonging to the *English* working class, and reacted aggressively to the influx of West Indians during the 1950s, whom they saw as a threat to their already disintegrating working-class communities. History has largely written the Teddy Boys off as thuggish 'Little Englanders' (i. e. racist bigots). In this paper, however, I attempt to show how the negative image of the Teddy Boys was largely constructed by adult society which, confronting the teenager phenomenon for the first time, sought to marginalise or even eradicate what it saw as a threat to civic order. Adult society (through such powerful organs as the police and judiciary, the press and cinematic media, and the education system), achieved this largely through creating a 'moral panic' among the population and scapegoating the Teddy Boys. This repressive response, however, demonstrates less about the Teddy

Boys *per se* than it does about the traumatised collective psyche of post-imperial Britain during the 1950s.

### 1. Youthquake

‘Whaddya rebellin’ against, Johnny?’

‘Wha’ya got?’

Johnny in *The Wild One*

The young always have the same problem—how to rebel and conform at the same time. They have now solved this by defying their parents and copying one another.

Quentin Crisp, *The Naked Civil Servant*

After six years of grim austerity, the years 1951-61 marked a period of unprecedented affluence in Britain (Bognador/Skidelsky 1970; Lewis 1978: 9-41). This was particularly so during the Macmillan years, when the Prime Minister informed a surprised population that they had “never had it so good” (Sked/Cook 1990: 138-59). Citing some telling statistics, the cultural historian Robert Hewison notes that

Between October 1951 and October 1963 wages were estimated to have risen by 72 per cent, prices by 45 per cent. There was full employment, and the availability and consumption of pleasurable possessions such as cars, washing machines, record players and television sets testified to the expansion of the ‘affluent society’.

(Hewison 1987: 6)

It is a commonplace of history that the most visible recipients of this economic dividend were the adolescent children of the generation that had fought in the Second World War. Already between 1945 and 1950 the average real wage of youth had increased at twice the rate of adults (Bourke 1994: 46). This trend continued during the 1950s, paving the way for that high-point of adolescent consumerism, the Swinging Sixties. It was amid such economic prosperity that the “teenager”—initially a working-class phenomenon—was born (Marwick 1991: 91-3; Lewis 1978: 141-2). Comparing his own adolescence with what he was witnessing in the 1950s, the novelist Colin MacInnes put his finger right on the major defining point of difference:

In those days [when I was an adolescent] there were big boys and girls, or young men and women—but no such thing as a teenager: who, one must insist, is a new kind of person, chiefly on account of his [*sic*] economic power. (MacInnes 1966: 57)

MacInnes was the first writer to describe the new teenager lifestyle with empathy and understanding in his cult novel *Absolute Beginners* (1959).

What distinguished working-class children from their parents more than ever before was not merely economics, however, but the widening discrepancy in their expectations of life, particularly with regard to leisure. Enjoying the greater egalitarianism that had arrived in the wake of the election of Clement Atlee’s Labour government in 1945, these young people had no intention of following their parents into forelock-tugging

social subservience. If their parents had known their place, so to speak, then these youngsters refused to recognise a fixed and inferior social station. The novels of Alan Sillitoe, Keith Waterhouse and David Storey probed this new working-class teenage refusal to pull on the yoke of adult responsibility and conformity. The new subcultural response of teenagers was thus

. . . both a declaration of independence, of otherness, of alien intent, a refusal of anonymity, of subordinate status. It [was] an *insubordination*. And at the same time it [was] also a confirmation of the fact of powerlessness, a celebration of impotence. (Hebdige 1996: 35)

The result of this expression of “alien intent” was the sudden appearance of what we now refer to as the “generation gap”. An early enquiry into this problem concluded that: “There are clear signs of alienation between the young people of today and the adult generations” (Schofield 1963: 6-7). One contributing factor may be what is perceived to be the innate conservatism of British society:

Britain is a nation which seems to attach particular importance to ‘tradition’. ‘Britishness’ in both the upper class and the working class tends to be characterised by an adherence to ‘old values’, and it could be argued that the British see themselves (and are viewed by the rest of the world) as having an ‘old’ (established, aged or even ancient culture). *In consequence, it might also be claimed that, precisely because of this British conservatism, young people are regarded as both threatening and vulnerable.* [my

emphasis](Storry/Childs 1997: 166)

The threat, as adult society saw it, manifested itself most clearly in the exponential rise in the juvenile crime rate during the second half of the 1950s. Offences committed by young people under the age of 21 rose from 24,000 in 1955 to 45,000 in 1959 (Lewis 1978: 118). For adult society the words ‘teenager’ and ‘juvenile delinquent’ were becoming almost synonymous.

Since the Sixties the existence of a separate teenage culture, in Western societies at least, has become a familiar concept—acceptable, too, largely on account of the fact that middle-class teenagers participated more and more in the creation of popular youth culture, diluting the initial anger of working-class youth, making it ‘safer’. It is perhaps necessary to recall, therefore, both the sense of claustrophobia felt by this first teenage generation, and the shock and incomprehension with which its rebellion was met by adult society at that time. Pushing against confinement, these working-class juveniles set about negotiating ‘space’ for themselves, sometimes through delinquent behaviour, (although, as we shall see, this was frequently sensationalised by the press media). As a result, adult society—the “Control Culture” (Clarke/Hall *et al.* 1975)—set in motion a whole range of disciplinary measures.

In Britain, the first adolescents to make a show of shaking off the austerity of the postwar period, “the first to walk down the road to the promised land of Teen Age” (Savage 1982: 12), and the first consequently to be disciplined by adult society were the Teddy Boys (hereafter referred to as Teds), so-called on account of their ‘Edwardian’<sup>1</sup> style of dress. The Teds first appeared around 1954 in working-class areas of south and east London.

They reached their peak in 1956, and died out after the race riots in the summer of 1958.<sup>2</sup> Though short-lived, their subcultural gesture had resounding significance:

The Teddy Boys broke new ground. They had established a teenage market. They had introduced a fashion that was totally working-class in its origins. And they had made it acceptable for males to dress purely for show. (Barnes 1991: 8)

They not only ‘dressed-up’, however; they were also prone to aggressive and violent behaviour. At a time when, as George Melly puts it, “good boys played ping-pong” (Melly 1970: 37), the Ted entered the postwar British stage as an “atavistic monster” (Rock/Cohen 1970: 289).

Youth subcultures are commonly seen as being somehow ‘self-generated’ and discrete phenomena; products entirely of the adherents of a given style: punks create punk style, skinheads create skinhead style. In this paper, I proceed from the view that working-class youth subcultures are products not of a single but of various complementary and mutually reinforcing discourses. In Section 2 I look at the Ted phenomenon as a multifaceted performance strategy involving the working-class body in three key activities: dressing-up, dancing and fighting. In Section 3 I turn to the response of adult society to the ‘threat’ posed by the Teds, and examine the specific strategies of control and discipline adopted to suppress it. In Section 4 I suggest that the Ted phenomenon, as it changed during its short life-span, was the increasingly notorious product of these complementary discourses. As the media sensationalised its reporting of Ted-related events, for example, the Teds, in an escalating spiral of delinquency, intensified

their anti-social behaviour and became what adult society expected of them. In other words, adult society's characterisation of the Teds may be seen as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

## **2. Dressing-up, dancing and fighting**

In his sociological study of youth subcultures Michael Brake makes the interesting general observation that

Once youth has separated itself from adulthood, and made a public dramaturgical statement about their difference from adult expectations of them, they feel free to explore and develop what they are. This is why their image is deliberately rebellious or delinquent. It quite dramatically emphasises their difference. (Brake 1990: 191)

The key phrase here is making a "public dramaturgical statement about their difference". What kind of difference were the Teddy Boys performing, and why?

To begin with the Ted style of dress, George Melly argues that its prime significance lay in the fact that it "represented one of the first successful attempts to establish a male<sup>3</sup> working-class fashion with a symbolic rather than a functional *raison d'être*" (Melly 1989: 166). Prior to the emergence of the Teds working-class males had limited scope in terms of dress: working clothes during the week and 'Sunday best' for the weekend. Casual clothes for adolescents were at that time unknown. What the Teds did was to cross the sartorial divide between functionality (overalls or 'best') and performativity (costume). With their long Edwardian drape jackets, narrow



I. A characteristic Teddy Boy of 1954, in drainpipe trousers and Edwardian jacket. ©Thames & Hudson, Ltd., 1994



II. A cinema manager attempts to restore order after Teddy Boys riot at a showing of *Blackboard Jungle*. © Plexus Publishing Ltd., 1987

drainpipe trousers, bootlace ties, brothel creeper shoes and quiffed hairstyles (see Illustration I), the Teds certainly cut outrageous figures. It should be recalled that when the first Teds made their appearance, rationing (including the rationing of clothes and the materials needed to make them) was still a fact of daily life (Sked/Cook 1990: 81). Thus the Teds undertook the considerable expense of buying their outrageous clothes precisely in order to make a defiant statement. Hebdige argues that

Far from being a casual response to “easy money” the extravagant sartorial display of the Ted required careful financial planning and was remarkably self-conscious—a going against the grain, as it were, of a life which in all other respects was, in all likelihood, relatively cheerless and poorly rewarded. (Hebdige 1988: 70)

The Ted’s peacock-proud costume thus flew in the face of the efforts of the war generation to ‘make do’, ‘get by’ and ‘pull together’ for the common good. Furthermore, the Teds added insult to injury by incorporating elements of upper-class dress into their style. Such a tactic, a common subcultural strategy of defiance, is referred to as *bricolage* (‘using the means at hand’), about which Clarke observes that

The generation of subcultural styles . . . involves differential selection from within the matrix of the existent. What happens is not the creation of objects and meanings from nothing, but rather the *transformation and rearrangement* of what is given (and ‘borrowed’) into a pattern which carries a new meaning, its *translation* to a new context, and its *adaption*. (Clarke 1998: 178)

How exactly did this dynamic of resignification operate in the case of the Teds? Soon after the war, the tailors of Savile Row—the traditional, typically conservative arbiters of British upper-class, male dress style—produced a more flamboyant line of menswear which came to be known as ‘Edwardian’ because it harked back to the golden age of Edward VII. Jackets in this style were single-breasted, long, fitted and often featured velvet trim on the collars and cuffs. They were worn with narrow trousers and fancy brocade waistcoats. Britain as a nation needed to regain its pride in itself and this upper-class ‘Edwardian’ style served both to symbolise a time when the greatness of Britain had been beyond dispute and to put a check on the ever increasing cultural hegemony of America. From the perspective of the British working classes, however, another interpretation must have been all too evident. The promise of a more egalitarian and less class-ridden society was being mocked by these upper-class ‘toffs’ in their velvet-trimmed collars and fancy accessories who were emphasizing rather than eradicating the demarcation line between the privileged and the ‘lower orders’. What the Teds, living in the bleakest and most blitzed parts of London, did was to expropriate the upper-class ‘Edwardian’ look and add to it eclectic features of American origin—Zootie styling and the cowboy’s ‘maverick’ tie. It was unmistakably a direct challenge to the authority of adult society, particularly the authority of what the Teds refused to accept as their ‘social superiors’.

In his autobiography, *Free Association* (1996), the working-class Jewish playwright Steven Berkoff (born 1936), looking back at his Teddy Boy years, recalls that

. . . you would always have your suits tailor-made even if it took a year of saving and many months of privation. A suit was your armour and your colours and further defined your sense of aesthetics. (Berkoff 1996: 15)

Thus costumed (in the fullest sense of the word), Berkoff the Teddy Boy was free to perform his image of himself on the dance floor:

The jive was one of the greatest dance forms ever invented. And so all your arts were in some way fulfilled. You were the dandy, the mover and performer in your own drama, the roving hunter and lover, the actor adopting for the girl the mask of your choice. (Berkoff 1996: 39)

What Berkoff's recollection demonstrates quite clearly is the extent to which the Teds, locked for the most part in soul-destroying unskilled jobs, were preoccupied with performing a vision of themselves. "They were using clothes to assert their right to have attention paid to them" (Lewis 1978: 120). In an act of self-empowerment, the Teds (and all working-class youth subcultures after them) were engaged in making 'somebodies' out of what society considered to be nobodies. They translated "the fact of being under scrutiny into the pleasure of being watched" (Hebdige 1996: 35).

Aside from individual self-projection, the Teds' concern with narcissistic perfectionism also served to express group identity in the face of social disenfranchisement. Michael Brake argues that

. . . youth cultures attract those who feel little commitment or

investment in the present state of affairs. It attracts those who feel misunderstood, or that they do not fit, or rejected. (Brake 1990: 191)

The Teds were the first teenage subculture in Britain to construct new identities for themselves in order to compensate for socioeconomic marginalisation. One explanation for this was that they came from a class that was in the throes of experiencing the break-up of its traditionally close-knit communities. The policy of slum clearance during the 1950s had a disastrous and irreparable impact upon the working-class communities of east and south London (Wilmott/Young 1990: 121-99). As whole streets of terraced houses and tenements were demolished and families were rehoused either in tower blocks or the new satellite towns on the outskirts of London, family and neighbourhood ties were broken (Phil Cohen 1996). The Teds, as with the skinheads who followed them a decade later (Clarke 1976a), thus felt the need to recreate community and territoriality among themselves by constructing and rigorously self-regulating a group-oriented style.

In addition to the more 'benign' strategies of donning a costume and dancing, the Teds also expressed their group identity through fighting. Why this should have been so is suggested in the 1953 American film *The Wild One*, in which the protagonist Johnny (played by Marlon Brando, an early icon of rebellious youth) the leader of a motorcycle gang, attempts to justify the group's delinquent behaviour. He declares that

These guys are nameless, faceless fry-cooks and grease monkeys all week, working at dreary jobs they hate. They do violent things because they've been held down for so long.

The Teds were not just proletarian; they were all more or less drawn from the “submerged tenth” of lower working-class youth—the lumpen (Jefferson 1975). Fyvel (1963) characterised the average Ted as a young unskilled worker whose earnings were too low and irregular for him to take part in the process of *embourgeoisment* enjoyed by his better-off working-class peers. Consequently, the Teds kicked against their limited options for leisure and social advancement. In his landmark study of working-class males in secondary education, *Learning to Labour* (1977), Paul Willis has demonstrated convincingly how, by dissociating themselves from the middle-class values dominating the education system, they effectively conspire in their own social oppression by condemning themselves to the least skilled and lowest paid employment. Consequently, leisure becomes extremely important for these working-class teenagers as they seek from it the excitement, self-respect and autonomy which are so conspicuously absent from work.

The common thread linking dressing-up, dancing and fighting is the body. Working-class youth subcultures express themselves through physicality:

Because of its high emotional content, teenage culture is essentially non-verbal. It is more naturally expressed in music, dancing, in dress, in certain habits of walking and standing, in certain facial expressions and ‘looks’ or in idiomatic slang. (Storey 1994: 73)

If, as Melly suggests, “[The Teds’] bodies were their canvas” (Melly 1970: 32), then they were also their weapons. For Bourdieu, the body becomes the site where working-class consciousness is materialized, particularly the

strong, excessive body. This working-class body, with its strength and virility, he argues,

. . . is perhaps one of the last refuges of the autonomy of the dominated classes, of their capacity to reproduce their own representation of the accomplished man and the social world, that is being threatened by all the challenges to working-class identification with the values of virility, which are one of the most autonomous forms of their self-affirmation as a class. (Bourdieu 1984: 384)

He continues with the assertion that

. . . a class which, like the working class, is only rich in its labour power can only oppose to the other classes—apart from the withdrawal of its labour—its fighting strength, which depends on the physical strength and courage of its members, and also their number, i. e., their consciousness and solidarity, or, to put it another way, their consciousness of their solidarity. (Bourdieu 1984: 384)

Since the Teddy Boys asserted themselves through powerful and dramatic physical performances, the response of adult or ‘normal’ society was to label, restrict, restrain or punish their bodies in a variety of ways. Foucault (1977) has revealed in detail the ways in which Western societies have used the body as the site where social power is most compellingly exerted. The body is where the power-bearing definitions of social and sexual normality are, literally, embodied, and is consequently the locus of discipline and punishment for deviation from those norms. In the following section I

examine some of the primary disciplinary measures taken by adult society to thwart the Ted threat.

### **3. Naming and taming the beast**

Adult society's response to what it perceived as the antisocial behaviour of the Teds was apparent first and foremost in the way it chose to talk about them. Upon their first appearance they were called, innocuously, 'Edwardians', as, indeed, were the original upper-class wearers of the style. As adult society proceeded to develop its negative attitudes towards them, however, so too did it begin to change its labelling strategy. With the increasingly sensational media coverage of Ted-related juvenile crime,

Those who now wore Edwardian dress were described in a vocabulary which derived from former modes of delinquency. Unfavourable social types were summoned forth to define them. They were 'zooties', 'hooligans' and 'spivs'<sup>4</sup>. (Rock/Cohen 1970: 290)

As a consequence of violent incidents during April 1954, this tendency picked up momentum. More and more, they were referred to as 'gang members' or, even more threatening, as 'gangsters', despite the fact that there is no evidence to suggest that the Teds organised themselves into gangs (Rock/Cohen 1970: 299). Rather this image was generated by sensational reporting in the press media. One commentator argued insightfully that the 'gang' representation may have been "simply a device for registering our [society's] lack of understanding" (Downes 1966). Thus adult society reacted less to the Ted than to its panic-driven conception of

him (Rock/Cohen 1970: 300).

In the same way that adult society had to name the phenomenon in order to set about pinning it down, so too did it attempt to position it through certain pejorative discourses or 'moral panics', a term coined by the sociologist Stanley Cohen in his book *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972). He argues that

Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media, the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. (Cohen 1972: 9)

Cohen adds that moral panics are generally linked with various youth cultures (particularly within the working class), whose behaviour is viewed as deviant or criminal. The very first moral panic with regard to a youth subculture in Britain was adult society's response to the Teddy Boy.

More pernicious on account of the stamp of authority with which they were invested were the attempts undertaken by sociologists, psychologists and other "socially accredited experts" during the 1950s and early-60s to analyse the lifestyle not just of the Teds but of the whole teenager phenomenon in a way that would 'explain away' the danger. Mark Abrams

(1959a; 1959b), for example, examined teenager spending patterns; J. Barnard (1961), in an attempt to understand the beast, drew up an “overview” of what he called “teen-age [*sic*] culture”; B. Berger (1963) wrote on the “youthfulness” of youth culture; Michael Schofield (1963) wrote portentously of the sexual behaviour of young people; and W. Miller (1958) sounded the alarm about gangs and delinquency. Boëthius notes that

Popular culture has almost always been considered a threat to young people. It has been associated with leisure or with the borderline area between family, school or work in which the control of guardians or supervisors has been limited or non-existent. The recurring attacks on popular culture have therefore been lodged primarily by representatives of these spheres: from parents, teachers or others who concern themselves with young people’s spiritual and moral upbringing. (Boëthius 1995: 39)

In the case of the Teds, a key discursive strategy on the part of ‘normal’ society was to view them as sociopaths or even criminals. Attempts were made by adult society to demonise them, often by ‘questioning’ their collective mental health. A typical example is the following extract from the rabid letter written by a ‘family doctor’ that was published in the *London Evening News* in 1954:

Teddy boys are . . . all of unsound mind in the sense they are all suffering from a form of psychosis. Apart from the birch or the rope, depending on the gravity of their crimes, what they need is rehabilitation in a psychopathic institution . . . because they have not

the mental stamina to be individualistic they had to huddle together in gangs. Not only have these rampageous youngsters developed a degree of paranoia with an inferiority complex, but they are also inferior apart from their disease . . . It is the desire to do evil, not lack of comprehension which forces them into crime. (Brake 1990: 73)

As a result of their flamboyant dress, their masculinity was also brought into question. It should be remembered that only a few years before the emergence of the Teds, the military uniform and shorn hair of the British soldier had been the index of 'normal' masculinity.<sup>5</sup>

Another powerful discursive weapon in adult society's arsenal was the cinema. At a time when cinema-going was still the most popular leisure activity, a whole series of 'social problem' films appeared that dealt with the Teddy Boy phenomenon: *Cosh Boy* (1953), *Violent Playground* (1958), *Sapphire* (1959), *The Angry Silence* (1960), *Wind of Change* (1960), *Flame in the Streets* (1961) and *The Boys* (1962), to name only the most prominent. This represented a concerted effort on the part of the British film industry, in league with the sociopolitical establishment, to demonise the Teds. As Bracewell argues,

More often than not . . . in the social problem films, Teddy Boys are merely 'folk devils' to whom a much broader violence or prejudice is attributed as though to remove the blame from society in general. (Bracewell 1997: 71)

The central purpose of *Violent Playground*, for example, is to demonstrate the failure of liberal measures to reform violent Teddy Boys and the need,

consequently, for punishment and repression—adult society is thus exonerated on account of its well-meaning but vain attempts to rehabilitate recalcitrant youth. As John Hill notes, “the social problem film deploys an image of teenage [Teddy Boy] violence in order to legitimate its own disciplinary solutions” (Hill 1986: 123). It is worthy of note that the British Board of Film Censors informed Free Cinema film-maker Lorenza Mazzetti that his proposed film about Teddy Boys would only receive a certificate for exhibition if it unequivocally condemned them. He refused to comply, and the film was never made (Hewison 1981: 193).

The most obvious strategy employed by adult society was physical suppression through intensified police action and, in some cases, incarceration. Beginning in 1954, following violent clashes between different groups of Teds, emergency police squads were set up in various towns around Britain. In Kingston, Surrey, for example, the police initiated ‘Operation Teddy Boy’ (Rock/Cohen 1970: 303). Teds were also subject to segregation and exclusion. Youths wearing Edwardian dress were banned from entering cinemas, dance halls, youth clubs, cafés and even fish and chip shops (Rock/Cohen 1970: 305). Clearly, the Teddy Boy was being defined increasingly as a ‘social problem’. And as Rock and Cohen note ominously, “A social problem is a thing about which ‘something ought to be done’” (Rock/Cohen 1970: 295).

#### **4. Conclusion**

Why did adult society respond with such overwhelmingly repressive measures? The most plausible explanation is that it needed to make a scapegoat out of the Teddy Boy for everything that was perceived to be going wrong with Britain in the 1950s: the antagonism between the

generations; the breakdown in law and order; racial tensions; and, more generally, Britain's increasing lack of self-esteem in the postwar order. For Britain the second half of the 1940s and the 1950s is a litany of grim soul-searching as the British people, proud of their imperial past and recent victory, faced—or rather, *refused* to face—the traumatic realisation that their nation would be playing a greatly diminished role in world affairs in the postwar dispensation, very much in the shadow of America. The Sterling crises of 1947 and 1949, Britain's humiliating and chaotic withdrawal from Palestine, Indian independence in 1947, and the Suez *débâcle* in 1956 were just some of the key developments that demonstrated that Britain was ceding centre stage in world affairs (Lewis 1978: 143-57). In popular parlance, Britain had 'won the war but lost the peace'. A deep loss of self-esteem was a grave problem for Britain domestically, too, epitomised by the troubled birth of an unfamiliar and largely unwelcome multicultural society. As a result of the McCarren-Walter Immigration Act of 1952, West Indians began settling in England (Sked/Cook 1990: 178-79). Immigrants also arrived in large numbers from India and Pakistan during the late-1950s, settling primarily in the working-class neighbourhoods of large cities. Since it was the working-class population that bore the brunt of the influx of immigrants, it was working-class youth who reacted with the most hostility, and adult society pointed the finger of blame at the Teds.

Racial violence came to a head in the summer of 1958 with disturbances in Nottingham and Notting Hill Gate in west London, in which Teds visibly participated. Although these violent events did not escalate into full-scale riots, they clearly indicated "a new and unattractive aspect of British social life" (Sked/Cook 1990: 179). The Teddy Boy, that "atavistic monster", was consequently made into the scapegoat for the failure of Britain to

incorporate the influx of immigrants from the West Indies and the Indian subcontinent successfully. The involvement of Teddy Boys in the disturbances made it possible to put the blame for racist violence on their shoulders even though there were manifestly other elements such as fascist organizations that took a very active part in whipping up hatred. In this sense, the 'moral panic' surrounding Teddy Boy racist violence reflected British society's increasingly strident "quarrel with itself" (Clarke/Hall *et al.* 1975: 72).

We have seen that in considering the phenomenon of the Teddy Boy broadly there have been two apparently competing yet in reality complementary and mutually reinforcing discourses in operation: the rebellious performance of the Teds themselves and the repressive measures taken by adult society. As adult society, through the moral panics that were stirred up by the media and various experts, created the Teddy Boy demon, so did the Teddy Boy respond by becoming that demon:

May [1956] saw the making of the Teddy Boy. He was given a form and a substance. He had become a 'menace'. He was not only introduced to the public, he was introduced to himself. He learned that, because he wore Edwardian suits, he must be a certain type of person. His suit led to differential treatment. He could pretend he was a member of 'normal' society because people did not treat him as one. He was rejected from more and more public places; in some areas only the cafés and streets were open to him. He thus became even more conspicuous and menacing. Above all, he learned that he shared common enemies and common allies with those who dressed like him. (Rock/Cohen 1970: 302)

A clear example of this in 1956 is the increased vandalism that resulted from the media reports of violent incidents related to the showing of the film *Blackboard Jungle* (see Illustration II), which featured Billy Haley's "anthem of dissident youth" (Lewis 1978: 129), 'Rock Around the Clock':

At the Elephant and Castle, the home ground of South London Teddy Boys, riots in the cinema were reported by excitable newspapers to have led to two thousand young people taking to the streets in an orgy of vandalism. By subsequent standards it seems to have been a mild sort of riot: nine arrests, two policemen injured, some cups and saucers thrown about the streets and one or two £1 fines awarded. But wherever the film was shown afterwards there was further trouble and ripping out of cinema seats . . . (Lewis 1978: 129)

It is certainly possible to see the *Blackboard Jungle* riots as an act of vengeance by the Teds on adult society for its expropriation of the most popular form of working-class entertainment at that time, the cinema, in its campaign of vilification through the social problem films.

What I have attempted to demonstrate in this paper is the extent to which subcultural identities—here the Teddy Boy's—are dialectically constructed through competing struggles and negotiations for space and for the right to exist. The significance of the Teddy Boy is that he was the first manifestation of this discursive interaction. What is of paramount interest in this case is the way in which the Teds became the scapegoats for an increasingly insecure and inward-looking society. Britain during the 1950s

clearly did not like the image of itself that it saw in the mirror (Vansittart 1995: 179-90). Its response was to create the image of its Other, the Teddy Boy, the face of violent, racist, insubordination. As Hebdige points out, although small in number, Teddy Boys had been “almost universally vilified by press and parents alike as symptomatic of Britain’s impending decline” (Hebdige 1979: 82). Thus the demonisation of the Teddy Boys, and of mods, rockers, skinheads and punks after them, is far more indicative of the health or otherwise of the collective postwar British psyche than of any innate infamy on the part of youth subcultures.

#### Notes

1. Ted is a familiar form of the given name Edward. The Edward in question is King Edward VII, who reigned during the years 1901-10, the ‘Edwardian’ Age.
2. Since the history of the Teds has been well documented, it is unnecessary to repeat this information here. For detailed accounts see Rock/Cohen (1970), Jefferson (1973; 1975), Middleton/Muncie (1982), Melly (1989), Brake (1990) and Polhemus (1994).
3. It should be pointed that although, as Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber note in their ‘Girls and Subcultures: An Exploration’ (McRobbie/Garber 1975), there were a small group of girls who saw themselves as Teddy Girls, the Teddy Boy style was primarily just that, a style for boys. In this paper, therefore, I treat it as primarily a manifestation of male youth culture.
4. The ‘zooties’ appeared in the 1940s in the United States. They were young African-Americans and Mexican-Americans who, by dressing up flamboyantly in zoot suits, established their style as “an emblem of ethnicity and a way of negotiating an identity. The zoot suit was a refusal: a subcultural gesture that refused to concede to

the manners of subservience” (Flügel 1971: 110). Two notable zooties were Malcolm X and Cab Calloway. ‘Spivs’ were the flashy black-market hawkers who appeared in Britain during the years of austerity immediately after the war (see David Hughes 1964: 86-105).

5. It is interesting that Arthur Seaton, the rebellious young protagonist of Alan Sillitoe’s novel *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1959), receives a beating for his delinquent behaviour at the hands of uniformed soldiers.

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### **Teddy-Boy als Opferlamm**

Robert J. Cross

Vor dem Zweiten Weltkrieg konnte man mit Recht Grossbritannien, bzw. England, als eine streng geordnete Klassengesellschaft beschreiben. Die sozialen Tätigkeiten und Lebenserwartungen jeder Stufe der Klassenhierarchie hatten genaue und bestimmte Grenzen und Ziele. Nach dem Wahlerfolg in 1945 von Clement Atlee und seiner Labour Partei, und nach der Gründung des Wohlfahrtsstaats jedoch, erfuhr die britische Bevölkerung (besonders die Arbeiterklasse) eine Art Lebensrevolution. In den Jahren 1951-63 stieg der Durchschnittslohn auf dramatische Weise und fast jedes Mitglied der Nachkriegsgesellschaft war in der Lage, die Früchte der wachsenden Wirtschaft zu geniessen. Vor dem Hintergrund eines solchen Wohlstands war der <Teenager> geboren.

Der erste subkulturelle Jugendstil, der in den fünfziger Jahren erschien, war der sogenannte <Teddy Boy>. Dieser Jugendkult war zuerst in 1954 in den östlichen und und südlichen Arbeitervierteln von London zu

beobachten. Am Anfang war der prächtige Stil des Teddy Boys ein reiner Ausdruck der Mode. Nach einem infamen Mordfall und verschiedenen anderen Gewalttaten wurde der Teddy Boy im Bewußtsein der Erwachsenengesellschaft ein <atavistisches Untier>, das unbedingt ausgerottet werden mußte. Als die <normale> Gesellschaft immer mehr repressivere Maßnahmen unternahm, wurde der Teddy Boy noch gewalttätiger, noch gefährlicher. In kurzer Zeit wurde er das, was sich die Erwachsenen eingebildet hatten.

Hier versuche ich das Teddy Boy Phänomen im Rahmen einer diskursiven Analyse zu dekonstruieren. Meine These ist, daß der Teddy Boy kein fester oder diskreter Begriff war, sondern das dialektische Produkt von verschiedenen und im Wettstreit miteinander stehenden Diskursen. Nachdem ich die verschiedenen performativen Diskurse der Teddy Boys beschreibe, analysiere ich die repressiven Gegendiskurse der Erwachsenengesellschaft. Ich versuche zu demonstrieren, daß diese Gegendiskurse nicht den Teddy Boy an sich, sondern <Grossbritanniens Streit mit sich selbst> darstellen.

Der Höhepunkt der gesellschaftlichen Repression der Teddy Boys kam in den Jahren 1956-58, als Grossbritannien eine tiefe Identitätskrise erfuhr. Nach der Befreiung Indiens 1947, den Sterlingkrisen von 1947 und 1949, der Suezkrise von 1956, und besonders nach der massiven Immigration in den fünfziger Jahren aus den früheren britischen Kolonien, brauchte Grossbritannien einen Sündenbock. Der Teddy Boy übernahm diese konstruierte Rolle. Später, aber aus anderen Gründen, nahmen die Mods und Rockers, die Skinheads und die Punks ähnliche Sündenbocksrollen ein.