



All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America

Glenn C. Altschuler

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The birth of rock 'n roll ignited a firestorm of controversy--one critic called it "musical riots put to a switchblade beat"--but if it generated much sound and fury, what, if anything, did it signify?

As Glenn Altschuler reveals in *All Shook Up*, the rise of rock 'n roll--and the outraged reception to it--in fact can tell us a lot about the values of the United States in the 1950s, a decade that saw a great struggle for the control of popular culture. Altschuler shows, in particular, how rock's "switchblade beat" opened up wide fissures in American society along the fault-lines of family, sexuality, and race. For instance, the birth of rock coincided with the Civil Rights movement and brought "race music" into many white homes for the first time. Elvis freely credited blacks with originating the music he sang and some of the great early rockers were African American, most notably, Little Richard and Chuck Berry. In addition, rock celebrated romance and sex, rattled the reticent by pushing sexuality into the public arena, and mocked deferred gratification and the obsession with work of men in gray flannel suits. And it delighted in the separate world of the teenager and deepened the divide between the generations, helping teenagers differentiate themselves from others. Altschuler includes vivid biographical sketches of the great rock 'n rollers, including Elvis Presley, Fats Domino, Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Buddy Holly--plus their white-bread doppelgangers such as Pat Boone.

Rock 'n roll seemed to be everywhere during the decade, exhilarating, influential, and an outrage to those Americans intent on wishing away all forms of dissent and conflict. As vibrant as the music itself, *All Shook Up* reveals how rock 'n roll challenged and changed American culture and laid the foundation for the social upheaval of the sixties.

All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America Details

Date : Published December 9th 2004 by Oxford University Press (first published August 7th 2003)

ISBN : 9780195177497

Author : Glenn C. Altschuler

Format : Paperback 226 pages

Genre : History, Music, Nonfiction, Academic, School, Culture, Pop Culture

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From Reader Review All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America for online ebook

victor harris says

A fairly strong critique of the cultural influence of Rock 'n' Roll. It does a good job with the 1950s explaining the multiple music traditions that would blend into what would be come described as Rock and R. Most prominent of these were of course recordings by black musicians that would have tremendous impact on Elvis and other icons of the Rock pantheon. As Rock mutated it would serve the rebellious undercurrent of 50s and 60s teens and blend with the Civil Rights movement, anti-war movement, and other segments of the emerging counterculture.

The narrative is first rate when it covers the ascent of the early rockers, the upheaval in the record industry, and the religious and conservative forces that attempted to stifle the growth of R and R. It is suspect and much too cursory in evaluating the 1960s and such performers as Dylan. To suggest that Dylan's career as a political protest singer commenced in '65 with "Like a Rollin' Stone" is way off the tracks. He was well established by then and had recorded his most famous protest songs before that.

One other noteworthy defect is the organization of the chapters. There are rarely any markers or breaks between ideas and themes, and the paragraphs often run on interminably, containing lists and artists, and do not effectively transition between topics.

Those criticisms aside, it is a good snapshot of the era and has enough engaging content to earn a good but not outstanding rating.

Katie says

Also having to read this for my Politics of Rock-n-Roll class.

Monica says

This is quite a good look at the early history of rock and roll and in particular, reactions to it. I found it incredible how EVERYONE joined in on the frenzy in one way or another, but usually denouncing it. Parents, media, the music industry, non-rock musicians, politicians, etc. Everyone felt strongly about this musical genre and as a result, this music absolutely changed the cultural history of North America and beyond. Very cool.

Kip Williams says

Alschuler's book, written as part of the Pivotal Moments in American History series, present rock and roll's birth, from Alan Freed, from Sun Studios, from the Mississippi Delta and how it burst onto the post-WWII scene and changed American culture and society forever.

It explores how both society influenced the music, and how music influenced society, as presented in the clear split between the Pat Boone-Frank Sinatra followers, and disruptive, raucous, loud music and fans of Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis, Bill Haley and The Comets, Little Richard, and Chuck Berry among others, and how

it changed the face of American society forever.

Probably especially pertinent these days, as people express some type of nostalgic yearning and longing for a homogeneous, plain vanilla, "traditional" values society that in truth never existed and isn't a valid concept of America as it was, it explores the societal undercurrents that drove the music, and movies like *Blackboard Jungle*, *Rebel Without A Cause* and *The Wild Ones*, and brought forth literary works like Salinger's *Catcher In The Rye*, and how that rebelliousness, that willingness to pursue paths and goals that aren't pure, chaste and plain vanilla was uniquely expressed in rock and roll, the unique American art form.

Holliferous says

So I had to read this for a history course. It's possible that, when I reread it in about a year, I will like it quite a bit more.

Rebecca Dobrinski says

In *All Shook Up*, Glenn C. Altschuler examines the changing times of the 1950s through the lens of popular music. During the 1950s it seemed that nothing was truly safe from change. McCarthyism and anti-communism changed labor unions and politics. Suburban construction changed the demographics of cities. A tired seamstress on a bus changed how people used public transportation. The swivel of a man's hips and the twang of a guitar changed music forever.

Altschuler focuses his chapters on rock 'n' roll's affects on specific aspects of social culture in the 1950s. He describes how white kids listened to and danced to music performed by black artists. He also shows the different ways black artists either catered to white audiences or tried to assimilate into white culture. Coinciding with the publication of the Kinsey Report, rock 'n' roll lyrics came under even more scrutiny, with parents and lawmakers believing that the music was responsible for teenagers experimentation with sex. Rock 'n' roll music was blamed for generational conflicts and teenage rebellion. Some people even linked the lure of rock 'n' roll to communist conspiracies.

However, I think Altschuler is giving too much responsibility to this single aspect of popular culture. While I believe in the power of music as well as the importance it plays in modern teenagers' search for identity, I hesitate to give music as much responsibility for social change as he does. By singling out rock 'n' roll music and giving the genre such weight in affecting the lives of teenagers, the country should have experienced the highest rates of unmarried teenage pregnancy, a complete turn around into a communist country, high rates of incarceration and lawlessness, and a frenzied orgy in every small town. However, this did not happen in the 1950s.

What did happen was that rock 'n' roll played a role in an environment that was ripe for change. It is another item on the list that made the 1950s such a significant decade. Within the context of anti-communism, McCarthyism, the Interstate system, suburbanization, television, conspicuous consumption, the automobile, the Cold War, and technological advances, it is an important factor that would not be as significant without looking at the decade as a whole and the 1950s-1960s as an era.

Music was a social lubricant and a personal identifier in many cases, but was not the catalyst for the social changes the US experienced in the 1960s. It set the groundwork for a musical revolution, but so did musical

technology like the electric guitar. Altschuler defines rock 'n' roll as strictly a teenage phenomenon, but music transcends generations. It may not have happened in every household, but I'm sure that some parents enjoyed rhythm and blues music or bought Elvis records.

In his Epilogue, Altschuler chooses Bruce Springsteen as the heir apparent to the 1950s music, but then he explains that Woodstock was the natural progression for a generation that came of age on rock 'n' roll. I fail to see the segue way between the 1950s and Woodstock or Woodstock and Springsteen. The Woodstock generation were simply too young to have been as affected by the advent of rock 'n' roll.

Lori says

I was required to read this for my high school history class and I am so happy my teacher chose this! I still have it five years later and flip through it from time to time. This book does exactly what it says it will do, and the history of rock 'n' roll in America is such an interesting one. If you love 50's and 60's history or are a music fan, this is such a fun read!

Brian says

OG reading this for a music history class. Does a good job of articulating the role of music in sexual and racial politics, but I found it a little plodding.

Brian says

Rock n roll may seem like an odd choice for a pivotal moment in American history but altschuler supports his thesis very well and by the end I was convinced. This book is an overview of the business, politics, race relations, and generational relations stemming from rock and roll. It looks at rock's early years through the "day the music died". If you are looking for a book that will serve as an introduction to the rock n roll movement then look no further. I was very impressed with the information presented and as someone who knew nothing about the history of rock when I started I was pleased with how much I learned. It leaves a few places hanging such as what happens to Elvis after he joins the army but mostly it covers everything in the right amount of detail. Highly recommend.

Sq.Hill Library says

A good guy book, probably for 5th graders and up. It's a witty and fairly realistic story about a 7th grade boy who moves from Boston to Chicago to live with his dad while his mom takes care of a sick grandmother. The kicker is that once he arrives, Dad tells him that he has lost his job and is now a professional Elvis impersonator. Think back to being 13; how would you feel if you found out dad was dressing up as Elvis?! Josh is not happy. Of course though, everything works out in the end. A bit predictable, but... all in all not a bad guy recommendation.

Landon Allender says

When Glenn C. Altschüler wrote *All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America*, he must have been educated in the history of Rock and Roll. This book follows the decade of the 50's, in which the genre of Rock and Roll was invented. Rock and roll ignited a fire of controversy for America and created many different opinions. It started during the civil rights movement and invented the term "race music". Rock and roll was started a rebellion in teens and most of these actions were blamed on African Americans. This book combines the change of the decade for America and the racial issues caused by rock and roll.

The theme explained by Glenn C. Altschuler in this book is to be ready for change. In the book, the reader learns that most of the American population wasn't ready for this thing called "Rock N Roll". They weren't ready for change. When Altschuler writes, "Many Americans believed that Rock N Roll was an irritant that provoked conflict between parents and teenagers and increased antisocial behavior"(99), it is saying that many people of the older generations thought Rock N Roll caused many problems. This quote is a good way to demonstrate how people were not ready for change. The older generation was not ready for change, and because of that, they created excuses against rock and roll.

In this book, Altschuler's style is informative. He is informing the readers of the history of Rock N Roll and the problems it caused. A good example to demonstrate his style is: "The emergence of rock 'n' roll as a cultural phenomenon coincided with great ferment in the movement to grant civil rights to African Americans"(35). This quote is a good example of how Altschuler writes the story. He writes not only of the rock 'n' roll music, but also the problems that America faced with it. He wrote a lot about the influence that African Americans had on it, and also the impact it had on them. Another good example of his writing style is: "My heart's beating rhythm/ and my soul keeps singing the blues/ Roll over Beethoven/ tell Tchaikovsky the news"(131). This quote is a good example to demonstrate how the author starts his chapters. The author has good chapter starters and starts them with entertaining sayings or, in this case, song lyrics. By doing this, it makes the reader want to continue reading the book.

I really liked *All Shook Up: How Rock 'N' Roll Changed America*, and I didn't just read it, I learned lots of new information. The way the author writes is fascinating and it makes me want to continue reading. This book has inspired me to get more into the history of music and rock 'n' roll. One thing that I would do however, is put less facts and more of the author's personal opinion. This book is very different from other things I have read, but I would definitely read something else like this again.

Jester says

This book focuses on the emergence of the genre, what the author contends are its roots, which is primarily the 1950s. When he hits the 60s, a couple pages are given to the Beatles, another couple to Woodstock, then we are treated to a strange few pages about Springsteen that jumps into the 80s. It's like the editor told him to keep the book under 200 pages, so once he hit page 185 and realized he wasn't into the 60s yet, he wrapped up quickly. Altschuler states his case for the development of rock 'n' roll and does a decent job of it for the 50s, he just failed to finish the story, or to even get to the middle of the story. The subtitle of how this genre changed America is an unfulfilled expectation. His explanation of some of the tributarial forces is good, we

just never get to the river.

Brian Collins says

This history primarily looks at Rock 'n' Roll in the 1950s and early '60s with a brief look at the music from the Beatles through the 1980s toward the end of the book. Altschuler documents the initial concern of parents, community leaders, and office holders about the sexual nature of rock lyrics and performances. He documents that personalities such as Pat Boone and Dick Clark presented a moral face to the music, and that labels cleaned up lyrics for recordings. These moves made it possible for rock to take root in American culture. Altschuler then documents the return to more sexualized lyrics, themes that stoked "generational conflict," and eventually music that promoted the political issues of the New Left. By the 1980s, however, even the Right appeals to the music of the counter-culture, as exemplified by Ronald Reagan's invocation of Bruce Springsteen. Though Altschuler writes as one sympathetic to the genre, it seems clear by the end of the book that the early critics' concerns—that the music promoted sexual immorality and rebellion against authority—were clearly justified by the development of the genre and the effects on American culture that Altschuler documents.

BCMUnlimited says

I love history. I also love music. I'm in my early thirties, but as a child I remember my mom and dad playing Elvis, Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis, Buddy Holly, and many other classic "oldie but goodies." The music of the 1950s and 1960s are among my all time favorite. (I enjoy the music from the 70s through today, but there is just something special about the music from the 1950s especially.) When I saw that I had to read *All Shook Up* as part of my American History graduate class, I was beyond excited. I adore those books that combine two loves in one!

Altschuler traced the lineage of rock 'n' roll from its roots in the mid-1940s in rhythm 'n' blues and jazz to its decline in the late '50s and briefly touches on its renewal in the mid-60s with the British Invasion. Rock 'n' roll was a uniquely American development that reflected the tumultuous undercurrents of the supposed conformist era of the 1950s.

Into this narrative, he incorporated the social implications of this new form of music. As both an expression of the racial boundaries and an attempt to tear down those boundaries, rock 'n' roll simultaneously divided America and brought her together. Racial lines were blurred by artists such as Elvis, Nat King Cole, and Jerry Lee Lewis. At the same time, white artists were making covers of black songs in order to promote rock 'n' roll to a larger white audience. This was also an attempt to convince the older generation that rock 'n' roll was not as sexually-charged as they believed.

All Shook Up looked closely at the generational divide that existed during this era. As teens were buying and listening to rock 'n' roll albums from both white and black artists, adults were seeking ways to crush out this phenomenal music movement. Parents feared that their white teenage daughters were lusting after black performers, and they feared the results of this co-mingling of the races. The generational divide was glaringly apparent during this time when conformity was the ideal promoted through media outlets.

Another great aspect of this work is the examination of the payola scandals and trials. Pay to play caused an

incredible backlash against rock 'n' roll. It ruined the lives of many prominent djs, including Alan Freed, the dj who coined the term "rock 'n' roll" as the name of this new genre of music. Even the illustrious Dick Clark was implicated in the payola scandals, though he was able to clear his name with the help of television executives and continued to build his mega empire of music.

While *All Shook Up* provides a brief exploration of the history of rock 'n' roll, it is certainly not an all inclusive history of the subject. He ends the book with just a brief mention of the Beatles and the British Invasion of the mid-60s. He also neglects the rise of the girl groups and many other artists that have become icons of the "old time rock 'n' roll." In spite of this short coming, this book offers a brief and informative introduction to the phenomenal world of rock 'n' roll.

This book was an enjoyable read. I would recommend this work for anyone who enjoys history, rock 'n' roll, or just wants something a little different to read. *All Shook Up* is a great book for a wide range of individuals.

See official review: [http://www.bookscompleteunlimited.c...](http://www.bookscompleteunlimited.com...)

Bob O'bannon says

It is generally regarded as naive to think of rock music as a threat to good morals and the American way of life, and early (in the 1950s) alarmist assessments of rock as "cannibalistic and tribalistic" (6) do seem pretty silly, especially knowing that the alleged danger at the time was posed by performers like Elvis Presley and Chuck Berry (a far cry from Slipknot and Converge), but it's hard to deny that rock music over the years has strongly influenced American culture, which is what this book argues. The question is whether the result has been positive or negative, which is something this book doesn't really answer. Altschuler gives a lot of sociological analysis, not always related directly to the musical genre, but seems reluctant to offer any kind of judgment as to exactly "how rock n roll changed America."

Anyone questioning whether rock music can have a positive influence in people's lives should read the epilogue, where Altschuler describes the power of the music of Bruce Springsteen. One fan said the Boss' music "changed my life" and offered "a narrative in which hopes and dreams that felt ridiculous were afforded dignity..." (189); another said the music "makes me feel like I belong in this world." (191). Those are strong statements about the life-affirming power of art.

At the same time, Jim Morrison is quoted as saying rock musicians were "erotic politicians" who were interested in "revolt, disorder, chaos and activity that has no meaning." (184). To the degree that this serves as a sincere manifesto for the music, and in a culture that in 2017 seems characterized by moral anarchy, one has to wonder whether we should be happy about the long-term results.

These were the questions I was hoping would be explored in some detail in this book, but that's a little hard to do adequately when the analysis is limited mostly to a few years in the late 1950s. Aside from some brief comment on the Beatles and a few pages on Woodstock, plus the comments on Springsteen, the 1960s and after are mostly ignored.

But in any case, whether for good or for bad, it's hard to deny Altschuler's claim that rock has brought "meaning and order to the lives of millions of people." That's what the power of music can do.

