

Cashmore, E. Ellis (1984) *No Future: Youth And Society*. Heinemann, London & New York. ISBN 0-435-82164-4 ISBN 0-435-82163-6 Pbk

Longman's Dictionary of English Language and Culture defines youth as "the quality or state of being young", and it seems to encapsulate what E. Ellis Cashmore's *No Future. Youth and Society* describes. The 111-page book is a history of working class youth in Britain, based on Cashmore's six-month stay in the West Midlands where he collected information 'straight from the horse's mouth' as it were, i.e. shuttling between dole offices and talking to the young people he found in the queues there.

The greatest value of the book lies in the author's learned analysis of the lives of the young in Britain, and particularly in its illustration of the story of Mark. Mark is an unemployed youth from Small Heath, Birmingham, who talks of 10 years of his own life (1974-1984), the economic conditions and the prospects for his generation, and the price of technological progress that he and his mates have had to pay. Mark's straight-forwardness and rough language, explained and commented on by Cashmore, allow us to live the life of such Midland youths; indifferent, resigned, finding refuge in music, drugs or, worst of all, suicide. Yet what follows is an in-depth study of a working class generation. Numerous references to youth culture, as it is broadly-understood, are given on every page of the book, including the title which comes from a line of the Sex Pistols' scandalous *God Save the Queen*: "With no future, there cannot be sin".

Cashmore, together with Mark, the character who binds all the chapters together, guide us through the years 1945-1984. Developments in youth culture, especially among the disaffected and marginal, illustrate how this time was not necessarily one of an increase in standards of living and opportunities it might otherwise seem. We quickly discover that the life of a working class youth has always been frustrating with an outlook just as grim as it was in 1984 but, as Cashmore points out, the book was never intended to be an easy read; instead its purpose is to reflect reality.

The book covers the history of post-war youth culture in Britain, concentrating on spectacular marginal subcultures and linking them with the music of their time. It does this in six chapters:

Living in a Void is the book's opening where we learn about young people in post-war Britain 1945-54; unformed, readily following the patterns set by their parents and striving to get the country out of austerity and recession.

Why Don't You All F...F...F...? - a quote from The Who's *My Generation* is the title of the second chapter. This takes us through the years 1955-1980, and offers a step-by-step account of how, what we now call youth culture, began to take shape. Between 1955 and 1964, we learn that the relative affluence of British society at this time brought the record player and cemented the link to music, while the first 'organised' group - the teddy boys - appeared.

In the years 1964-1968 a further two groups arrived: the mods, with their neat clothes and love of black music, and the rockers, clad in denim trousers and leather jackets. They both strongly identified themselves with music and specific styles of dressing.

Between 1969 and 1975 further subcultures emerged. The distinctive skinheads 'protesting' against all those they dubbed 'deviant' e.g. 'poofs', 'Paki's' or 'long-hairs', in the derogatory and offensive language they used. Although very small, this new group rapidly turned into a violent force for which 'Paki-bashing' and 'poof-hunting' could be a daily routine. One group they developed to oppose were the hippies, an American, and largely middle class, import actively promoting a 'counter-culture', communal living, peace and love, and a rejection of western society with its rat race.

In the late 70s (1976-1980), the Sex Pistols had produced a moral panic, and punk rock and its culture developed from this. Torn clothes, rags and materials never intended to be worn like bin-liners "... held together with safety pins ..." were not their only novelty. Their impact was powerful enough for hundreds of similar bands to appear, and gain a reputation for violence, vulgarity and mindlessness not always deserved. Other rock bands became defined as heavy metal in reaction, this was considered the music of those who "(...) challenged nothing [and] respected nothing" e.g. AC/DC and

Iron Maiden. While bands such as Led Zeppelin, part of the progressive rock movement of the late 60s, found themselves retrospectively re-labelled.

Shades of Black, Shades of White, as Cashmore calls chapter 3, is a return to the 1970s and the rise of the Rastafarian movement. Coupled with reggae, this black-inspired way of life appealed to thousands of youths, not only black and not only in Britain. As a belief rather than a fashion it put forward the concept of Babylon, a system of "mental slavery" which was blamed for racism, unequal life opportunities, dilapidated housing and poor education, while another aspect was to advocate a mass return of blacks to Africa.

Skinhead Mentality hits the pages again in chapter 4. With the return of violence and Nazi ideology, the British Movement and the National Front established themselves in the late 70's, appealing to fascist-minded youths and aiming to revive vaguely-understood 'traditional' values.

Finally, Behind the Riots (chapter 5) brings the book up to the date of its publication (1984), with an explanation of why the young resorted to petrol-bombing police cars, smashing shop windows and damaging private property.

The book ends with Future! - What Future? - a somewhat discomfiting look at the prospects that awaited working class youth in Britain in the 1980s, and the outlook then was anything but bright. With the failure of YOP (Youth Opportunities Programme), which had aimed at improving qualifications to give better job opportunities, they seemed to have nothing to lose. It was the era of Thatcherism. Many realised that in the world they lived in "you are what you have", and because they could not achieve much by legal means they felt ready to climb the rungs of the social ladder by stealing, shoplifting or mugging. Those on the dole queues claimed prison felt like home to them anyway; you just sit there and have nothing to do. For those too weak to get tough, glue-sniffing was a temporary escape from reality. In an attempt at striking a more positive (if ironic) note Cashmore observes that they are a new "creative, inventive [and] resourceful" breed and boldly dubbed them "dole technicians".

Cashmore's book is an absolute must for both students and teachers of British culture. It is a study of youth in Britain, complete with an original contribution from a representative of the group. Although published in 1984, and covering only the post-war period, it is a firm basis for further inquiry into the subject.

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