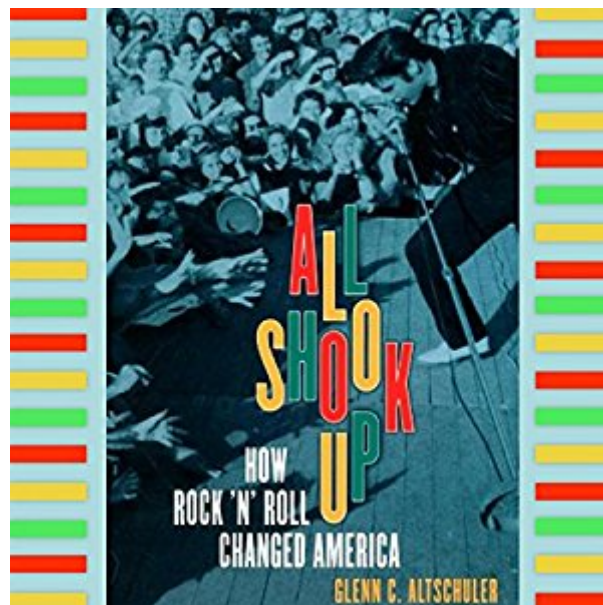




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# All Shook Up: How Rock Roll Changed America



## Synopsis

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.

The "Pivotal Moments in American History" series seeks to unite the old and the new history, combining the insights and techniques of recent historiography with the power of traditional narrative. Each title has a strong narrative arc with drama, irony, suspense, and - most importantly - great characters who embody the human dimension of historical events. The general editors of "Pivotal Moments" are not just historians; they are popular writers themselves, and, in two cases, Pulitzer Prize winners: David Hackett Fischer, James M. McPherson, and David Greenberg. We hope you like your American History served up with verve, wit, and an eye for the telling detail!

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"All Shook Up - How Rock 'N' Roll Changed America" by Glenn Altschuler is a terrific and well documented book on the seismic social, sexual and racial changes in the United States that was both reflected and precipitated by a new music sweeping the nation in the 1950s and 1960s. This new music with its roots deeply entrenched in largely black American R&B and Gospel literally shook a nation that wanted to believe itself innocent but was undergoing rapid change with the return of combat vets, the ensuing Baby Boom and the suburbanization of our country. Disposable income was rapidly on the rise and technological marvels of the day, such as the transistor radio, rapidly spread this revolutionary new music. Altschuler does a superb job in his narrative documenting this revolution from both a societal and a musical perspective. He is perhaps at his best in describing the backlash against rock and roll as it began break in a color barrier that was still sacred to many, mostly white, Americans. He quotes authors of the day, "with tom-toms and hot jive and ritualistic orgies of erotic dancing, weed-smoking and mass mania, with African jungle background. Many music shops purvey dope; assignations are made in them. White girls are recruited for colored lovers . . . and guarantee a new generation subservient to the Mafia". Obviously some strong backlash. Oxford University Press is to be commended along with the editors of this series, Pivotal Moments in American History, David Hackett Fischer and James M. McPherson for living true to their words of historical interpretation and reporting "they were the results of decisions and actions by people who had opportunities to choose and to act otherwise". Also by showing "increasing sensitivity to issues of race, ethnicity, class, and gender in the context of large structures and processes". This volume is a classical one of American Studies, an interdisciplinary review of a period of time where social change was rapid. Researching or writing about this time through the lens of only one discipline would clearly have short-changed this era. Neither Altschuler nor Fischer and McPherson allowed that to occur and, in a sense, showed

academic bravery for writing a serious book about our social history with rock and roll interwoven throughout.

Well written and easy to understand, this 185 page book tells the story of rock n roll from the 1940s to the 1960s. It tells the basic story without the tremendous depth , but instead talks about the effects of rock n roll on American society. It's an excellent primer on how the music of the 1950s affected the generation gap, the civil rights movement and set the stage for the unrest of the 1960s.

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 effects 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 & 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 & 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 & roll.

This is one of the best music history books I've ever had the pleasure of reading. Surprisingly, it was assigned for a US History class. All Shook Up tells the story of 20th century America through music. War, protest, loss, pride, love - all of it is explained here. I've convinced a few other people to read it, and they all really seemed to enjoy it.

The historical perspective of this book is more factual than personal; I'd have liked it better the other way around. I thought surely the book would be filled with anecdotal material. Still, it was an interesting read.

An Informative and enjoyable read.

A highly enjoyable and insightful book for a relatively brief analysis. As part of that generation, it was highly informative and meaningful.

Fair place, recommend it.

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