

BUCK 65 SITUATION

1957

- ... was the year of the Frisbee, Tang, and the **PINK FLAMINGO**
- ... was the year of **JAILHOUSE ROCK**
- ... was the year **BETTIE PAGE** vanished, at the peak of her popularity
- ... was the year the **BEAT GENERATION** was born
- ... was the year of ongoing **OBSCENITY** trials in the US congress
- ... was the year **SITUATIONIST** International formed in Italy
- ... was the year of the **GREAT LEAP FORWARD** in China
- ... was the year Pandora's Box opened: **SEX, DRUGS, ROCK 'N ROLL** and youth rebellion
- ... was the beginning of the **END**

The events of the year 1957 created a legacy that affects the way we live and think 50 years later.

For all intents and purposes, 1957 marked the beginning of youth rebellion culture. Most importantly, this was the year rock 'n roll broke into the mainstream and into public consciousness. Rock 'n roll existed before this of course, but in '57 artists like Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly, Eddie Cochran, Gene Vincent (read: white guys) had their first big hits. Rock 'n roll began to take over the airwaves and popular music charts from the crooners like Perry Como, Pat Boone and Dean Martin. This was the year that the film (and song) Jailhouse Rock by Elvis was released, and it caused a sensation.

Further, the Beat Generation emerged in '57. On The Road was published and "Howl" was banned. The Beats represented the voice of bored, disaffected youth, looking for thrills in the form of a libertine lifestyle (sex and drugs). Although the Beats were associated with jazz music (be bop in particular), their image and ideas were a perfect match for rock 'n roll.

Interestingly, 1957 was the year Bettie Page vanished. She removed herself from the public eye at the peak of her popularity as obscenity trials and hearings on juvenile delinquency were buzzing all around her. Society was up in arms over the groundswell of underground and 'deviant' cultures. There was panic. And it was responded to at the highest levels of government.

1957 was the year the seeds of the cold war were planted. The USSR launched Sputnik and Sputnik 2. The US conducted its first nuclear tests and the first large scale nuclear power plant opened in Pittsburgh. Paranoia mounted.

This was also the year Chairman Mao implemented his Great Leap Forward.

Another interesting development was that an organization called Situationist International formed in Italy in 1957. The Situationists believed that the ideas behind dadaism and surrealism could be used as a force for political change. The SI have two fascinating legacies. First, they were the driving force behind the student riots in Europe in May of '68. Also, Malcolm McLaren was a young student of the SI. Years later he would apply what he learned to a 'situation' called The Sex Pistols.

It could be argued that the only time since 1957 we've come close to the same kind of impact on society from an artistic movement was 20 years later, in 1977, when punk and the Sex Pistols broke (but punk essentially sought to re-capture the original spirit of rock 'n roll. Could a re-invention ever really have the same impact as the original concept?). Intriguingly, Sid Vicious was born in '57 and the Sex Pistols broke in '77 - the year Elvis died!

Although we're never likely to see a cultural revolution on the scale of 1957 again, we've been conditioned to expect it. The idea of one person - or a group - having ideas so new, so radical, so dangerous that they will change the world forever, is very exciting to us. We've been conditioned to anticipate 1957 happening all over again. Exactly 50 years later it's interesting to examine this idea and to question how far we've come, and how much has stayed the same.