

How far did British society change, 1939–1975?

Paper 2 will be on 1 of the following topics:

- **Immigration**
- **Women**
- **Youth**

It is important to remember that it also covers 3 different periods:

1939-45 : A period of **war** with the Second World War

Late 40s and 1950s : A decade of **transition** from rationing to prosperity

1960s and early 1970s : A decade of **revolution**

Once you know the examples you should consider these questions:

General Focus Questions

- What impact did the Second World War have on the British people?
- What was the impact of the National Health Service on people's lives?

Immigration Focus Questions

- What immigrants were living in Britain in 1945?
- Why did different groups migrate to Britain between 1948 and 1972?
- What were the experiences of immigrants in Britain?
- What contribution had immigrants made to British society by the early 1970s?

Women Focus Questions

- What was life like for most women in the 1950s?
- How were women discriminated against in the 1960s and early 1970s?
- What factors led to changes in the roles of women?
- How much change had taken place for women by 1975?

Young People Focus Questions

- What was it like growing up in the 1950s?
- Why were there changes in the lives of teenagers in the 1960s?
- How did teenagers and students behave in the 1960s and early 1970s?
- How far did the lives of all teenagers change in the 1960s and early 1970s?

Immigration: War (1939-1945)

Britain became a more multi-cultural society during the Second World War. This is represented by the famous propaganda poster 'Together' (1941). The new arrivals had a range of experiences and impact, partly because they were from such a diverse range of groups:

American GIs (from 1942)

- Were popular with British women. They were wealthy, confident, and not bothered about class
- Many black GIs lived in the segregated South of the USA, by contrast they were generally well treated by British people

British Commonwealth soldiers

- Included Australians, Canadians, New Zealanders, Indians
- There were many marriages between white commonwealth soldiers and British women
- Polish soldiers fought with the British army and at the end of the war 12,000 stayed

Italian and German prisoners of war

- Half a million prisoners were generally well treated and worked in agriculture
- 25,000 Germans chose to stay in Britain at the end of the war



Immigration: Transition (Late 40s and 50s)

In the first half of the 20th century most immigrants had come from Ireland. They continued to be one of the largest groups in the 1940s and 50s. However there were more immigrants coming from Eastern Europe to escape communism (200,000 between 1945 and 1950). There were also immigrants arriving from the British Commonwealth, in the 1950s most were from the Caribbean:

- Many had fought as soldiers for Britain in the Second World War
- Britain had a labour shortage and needed workers, by contrast there was unemployment in Jamaica
- Some British companies advertised for workers in the Caribbean – like the NHS and London Transport.
- In 1948 the British Nationality Act gave passports to all the people in the British Empire
- The Empire Windrush (1948) was one of the first big ships to arrive with Caribbean immigrants. By 1958 there were 115,000 Caribbean immigrants.

The experiences of these immigrants and attitudes towards them were often, though not always negative. Many experienced a 'colour bar'. They were forced into slum housing, run by people like Peter Rachman. They were refused service in bars, and bed and breakfasts had signs saying 'No Irish, no blacks, no dogs'. They were given lower paid jobs, or refused work - in 1963 Black and Asian people boycotted the Bristol bus company for refusing to employ black and Asians. Banks also refused immigrants loans or mortgages.

In 1955 transport workers in the Midlands went on strike complaining that blacks were taking their jobs. In 1958 there were riots in Notting Hill in London between white teddy boys and local immigrants. The violence became even worse the following year after a black man was murdered by six white youths.

Immigration: Revolution (60s and early 70s)

During the 1960s and 1970s there was continued immigration, particularly from India, Pakistan and Uganda. Asians had been living in Africa for many years in the British Empire. As these countries became independent in the 1960s many Asians felt persecuted for being successful businessmen and about 20,000 moved to Britain. In 1972, President Idi Amin in Uganda expelled 50,000 Asians, most of whom came to Britain.

There was also immigration from India and Pakistan. These people mainly came for economic reasons and expected to return to India. Many Sikhs had served in the British Army and some also left because of violence in India. Many of these groups moved to the Midlands and North of England.

There was also legislation relating to immigration and race. There were laws to restrict immigration e.g. the 1962 Immigration Act meant that only skilled workers were allowed into Britain, the 1968 Immigration Act introduced vouchers, but ended up favouring white immigrants because you were allowed in if you had a British grandparent. There were also laws to stop racism with the Race Relations Act in 1965, although it had few powers to do anything.

In 1967 the National Front was set up, calling for an end to immigration and for immigrants to be sent home. Enoch Powell famously argued in 1968 that immigration would lead to 'rivers of blood' but this successful conservative politician was forced to resign.

However a multi-cultural society had begun to emerge by the mid-1970s, and immigrants had begun to make a significant contribution to British society. Women like Sybil Phoenix set up youth groups and community work. Immigrants kept public services running, 1/3 of doctors in 1970 were born overseas. Music developed with Reggae, and the Notting Hill Carnival starting in 1958. Many immigrants became successful businesspeople. Finally, immigrants transformed British food!

Women: War (1939-1945)

During the Second World War, the role of women changed as they made contributions to the war effort, for example, civil defence, the land army, factory work, joining the armed forces and looking after families.

- 1941 – all women over 20 had to register for war work – most worked in factories [often making munitions]
- 1945 – nearly 90% of women worked in industry or the armed forces
- Trade Unions accepted female workers
- Mothers had to learn how to manage work and looking after their families
- The government opened nurseries to help women cope
- Women in the armed forces were only allowed to have non-fighting roles

These changes had some impact after the war, but in many ways things went back to as before.

- Many women lost their jobs at the end of the war, however some did continue, particularly older women
- More married women worked in 1947 [18%] than in 1939 [10%]
- Many women had gained confidence from war work
- Many women were keen to get married at the end of the war.

Women: Transition (Late 40s and 50s)

The 1950s saw a new Queen [1952] and they also saw the beginnings of change for women. In 1950 36% of women worked and this increased during the 1950s. However there was still an informal 'marriage bar' – women were expected to give up work when they got married. Women were paid less than men, even if they did the same jobs. In 1955 the government promised to pay its male and female workers the same, for example teachers and doctors.

During the 50s and early 60s there were more marriages and a 'baby boom'. Electricity, vacuum cleaners, washing machines and refrigerators meant women spent less time on housework and made home life easier and more comfortable.

Some women's groups such as the Six Point Group campaigned for equal rights.

Women benefited from the new **National Health Service**, set up by the Labour Government in 1948. The Conservatives and many doctors had tried to stop the NHS however it had a big impact:

- free medical and dental treatment were liked by British people
- by 1975 the number of doctors doubled
- women could get free high quality maternity care, midwives and health visitors
- life expectancy rose
- school nurses improved the health of children
- free vaccinations reduced deaths
- infant mortality fell sharply (halving by the mid-50s)

Women: Revolution (60s and early 70s)

Half of all women worked by the 1970s. The number of married women in work had also doubled since the 1950s. The marriage bar was largely a thing of the past, but some women now felt under pressure to work *and* look after the family.

Women were still generally in lower paid jobs than men. In 1968 women went on strike for equal pay at the Ford Factory in Dagenham (they eventually settled for 92%). The Equal Pay Act of 1970 made it illegal to pay men and women differently for the same job however it was not actually enforced until 1975 with the Sex Discrimination Act.

In the 1960s and early 1970s women campaigned more actively for equal rights. Groups of feminists called for 'women's liberation'. Women like Germaine Greer became famous for demanding equal pay, equal education, 24 hour nurseries and free contraception and abortion.

The introduction of the contraceptive pill in 1961 changed some women's lives and attitude, although at first it was only available to married women. After 1965 the birth rate fell quickly. Abortion was also legalised in Britain in 1967.

The 1969 Divorce Law Reform Act also allowed couples to divorce more easily, and the law was changed again in 1970 to give women half of what the money the couple had earned during the marriage.

Young People: War (1939-1945)

During the Second World War life changed for many children because of:

the Blitz (1940-41) – the bombing was very frightening for children and parents

40,000 killed including 5000 children. Nearly 1.5 million homeless
evacuation – was voluntary but 50% of city children were evacuated
rationing – e.g. meat, cheese, eggs. Children grew up being used to shortages e.g. sugar

diet – improved with more vegetables and fewer sweets

education – larger class sizes and part time school as male teachers left for war, 1/3 of children left in city had no school,

'dig for victory' – people were encouraged to grow their own vegetables

Health – fresh air, better housing and diet meant that the health of evacuated children improved

the absence of fathers

There was also an increasing awareness on the part of the middle classes of the poor conditions for working class children, as children from slums went to live in middle class families in the countryside.

The **Beveridge Report (1944)** was supported by all the political parties in Britain and set out what the problems were: want, disease, ignorance, squalor, idleness.

It also suggested ways to tackle them – insurance to pay for sickness and unemployment, allowances for children, free health care, benefits would be universal [for all].

The Labour Party won the election in 1945 and introduced many of these things including the NHS, National Insurance and Family Allowances. Many Conservatives including Winston Churchill argued that these were good things but that the country couldn't afford them.

Young People: Transition (Late 40s and 50s)

At the start of the 1950s there was still rationing [until 1954], shortages and bomb damage. Young people acted and dressed like their parents, and the term 'teenager' only really became popular in the 1950s.

The lives of teenagers began to change in the 1950s, in part because of the impact of increased affluence [wealth], and also because of the impact of American culture. There was 'full employment'. The American actor James Dean became a popular hero in the film 'Rebel without a Cause', whilst Elvis had number 1 hits and shocked people with his dancing.

Separate youth cultures developed in the 1950s with, the growing popularity and impact of rock music, and changes to clothes and fashion. 'Teddy Boys' had distinctive jackets and D.A. haircuts. They sometimes formed gangs and had a reputation for street violence. There were reports of riots when the American film 'Rock around the clock' was played. However remember that this was a minority - most young people were not rioting Teddy Boys!

School places in the 1950s were decided by a test called the '11 plus'. Pass it and you went to a grammar school, and probably continued to university. Fail it and you went to secondary modern, probably left at 14 or 15 and had a lower paid job.

Young People: Revolution (1960s and early 70s)

The 'swinging sixties' are famous for big social changes:

Money - teenagers had more money and leisure time. As a result they were increasingly targeted as consumers – people to buy records, fashions, and to advertise to on TV. Teenagers bought 'transistor radios' which were small and portable.

Music - The number of 'singles sold rose from 5 million in 1955 to 1960. Music shows on TV attracted big audiences e.g. Top of the Pops and 'Ready, Steady, Go!'. Bands like The Rolling Stones and the Beatles were made up of young men writing for other teenagers and became very popular worldwide. Lyrics often talked about sex and drugs [Rolling Stones 'I cant get no satisfaction' Beatles 'Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds']. Pirate radio stations broadcasted from boats to play the new music until the BBC launched Radio 1 in 1967.

Fashion – Mary Quant introduced the 'mini-skirt' using the model 'Twiggy'. Hairdressers like Vidal Sassoon became famous, and the Kings Road in London became known as worldwide centre of fashion.

Rebellion - for example, Mods [scooters and suits] and Rockers [motorbikes and leather] fought at British Seaside resorts such as Margate in 1964. 100 teenagers were arrested in Brighton. The newspapers were horrified but there was little actual violence.

Sex - The percentage of teenage mothers did double between 1950 and 1975 (but only from 5% to 10% of all mothers). It is always difficult to judge changes in sexual behaviour as it is so private.

Education also changed with the introduction of comprehensive schools from 1965 and the expansion of universities [50,000 students in 1939 to 390,000 by the end of the 1960s]. Many students in the 1960s became involved in protests for example against the Vietnam War [1968], and against Nuclear Weapons [this group was called CND]. They staged peaceful 'sit ins' although these sometimes turned violent. The lives of teenagers had changed dramatically by the mid 1970s, however we must be careful about how much, and for how many. 86% of students at Leeds University for example found politics boring! A survey of who teenagers most respected showed it was their parents and the Queen.

There were **mixed reactions** to these changes by the authorities – but gradually they were accepted – the Beatles were given knighthoods. However many traditional people were shocked, for example when John Lennon said the Beatles were 'more popular than Jesus'. The authorities were also mocked in satirical magazines [Private Eye] and TV shows [That was the Week that was].