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The Ted Scare

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From their first appearance in 1953 through to roughly the end of the decade the Teddy Boys were a tabloid and broadsheet favourite. The press presented the Teddy Boy phenomenon as a youth-led pestilence. The Teddy Boys were primarily young men from the working classes in the United Kingdom and after they emerged into public consciousness in 1953, following an outbreak of fatal gang violence in South London, they became one of the most recognizable subcultures in British life throughout the 1950s. Miles describes them as '*the first British post-war rebels*'[1] whilst Cohen and Rock characterised them as the '*most visibly difficult of the postwar youth problems*'.[2] They were, to the media, to the political elites and to many members of the public the very picture of deviance and delinquency.

This article is divided up into three main sections. The first section looks at the emergence of the Teddy Boys in early 1950s Great Britain; it locates them in the specific social and economic conditions of the time. It discusses how they rose to prominence as a media phenomenon, how the media was able to use the 'New Edwardians' to project general societal fears about youth and behaviour, the process by which they became in the words of Stanley Cohen '*the first youth group associated with [...] deviant or public disapproved behaviour*'.[3] Although the 'Ted Scare' was largely a media contrivance, there is no doubt that the Teds represented the new (and threatening) power of youth. The awareness of the unique character of the Teds is very much reflected in the intellectual and political attention that was lavished on the Teddy Boys by major sections of the intelligentsia and the political classes.

The second part of this article examines the continuity between contemporary discourses about juvenile delinquency and older discourses concerning the problematic behaviour of the Teds. It also discusses proposed solutions to the perceived anti-social character of the Teddy Boys, ranging from the reintroduction of corporal punishment to the creation of a revitalised Youth Service in the UK to remove impressionable youngsters from 'bad' influences. Many of these enquires have been forgotten and it is remarkable that beyond the media hype there was a very real investigation as to the societal meaning and knock-on effects on the inculcation of citizenship values on young people belonging to this subculture. It is also important to see concerns about the Teds as not simply a British phenomenon

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[1] Peter MILES, *London Calling*, London: Atlantic Books, 2010, p. 57.
[2] Stanley COHEN & Paul ROCK, 'The Teddy Boy', in Vernon Bogdanor and Robert Skidelsky (eds.), *The Age of Affluence*, Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 288.
[3] Stanley COHEN, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, Oxon: Routledge, 2011, p. 203.

but as part of a global anxiety regarding the nature of modern youth: indeed, the United Nations gathered together information and opinion on 'new patterns of juvenile delinquency' and convened an international conference in 1960, located appropriately enough in London, the birthplace (according to some) of the Teddy Boy movement.

The third section discusses the implications of being labelled as deviant. There were attempts to ostracise or separate them from the mainstream, based on exaggerated fears of their disruptiveness and violence. The main example is the 1958 Race Riots in Nottingham and London where both the media and political elites pointed the finger at the Teds and as a result they were not just seen as thugs and delinquents but also as underclass racist fodder for the Union Movement led by Sir Oswald Mosley. This reputation turned out to be one that was difficult to shed and, since the end of the 1950s, those sympathetic to the Teds, as well as many former Teds, have sought to rehabilitate the image of a community, unfairly labelled, as they saw it, as racist and fascist.

The Teds as an object of study

There is a surprising lack of substantive study of the Teddy Boys. This is despite the fact that there is considerable interest in the Teds both in terms of their place in post-war Britain and also how they established the model for moral panics associated with youth. It was the Teds who were first on the scene, followed by Mods and Rockers, Hippies, Punks, Skinheads and all the other youth subcultures which have been transformed into 'folk devils' over time. The main scholarly studies of British youth in the 20th century have only really discussed them *en passant*. David Fowler, who has written two major studies on the issue, only mentions the Teds in the context of the larger debate on juvenile delinquency and then only in relation to Northern Ireland.[4] Adrian Horn, who produced a very impressive study on the Americanisation of British youth culture in the years from 1945 to 1960 called *Juke Box Britain*, only considers the sartorial evolution of the Teds from the styles associated with the Spivs and cosh-boys of post-war London.[5] William Osgerby's monograph for the Institute for Contemporary British History, *Youth in Britain since 1945*, has little to say on the topic.[6] Even Stanley Cohen, who did more than most to establish the legitimacy of the study of popular music youth cultures in his 1973 work *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, starts the work with the Mods and Rockers, with only the merest brief mention of the Teds.[7] In defence of Cohen, he did write the only detailed scholarly study of the Teds, which was for a collection entitled, 'The Age of Affluence', edited by Vernon Bogdanor and Robert Skidelsky, but that was in 1970. There is of more recent origin the work of Robert J. Cross, which addresses some of the issues in this article but does not really examine the way in which moral entrepreneurs helped generate the hysteria linked

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[4] David FOWLER, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, c.1920-c.1970*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008.
[5] Adrian HORN, *Juke Box Britain*, Manchester University Press, 2010.
[6] William OSGERBY, *Youth in Britain since 1945*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1997.
[7] Stanley COHEN, *op. cit*.

to the Teds.[8] Pamela Horn, in her single volume history of juvenile delinquency in the UK, does devote some significant attention to the Teds, as does John Muncie in his text *Youth and Crime*.[9] While the global study of other youth cultures of the 1950s has matured and advanced, the same is not true of the UK: there is no equivalent to Mark Fenemore's study of the East German Rowdytum called *Sex Thugs and Rock 'n' Roll* or Glen Altshuler's study *All Shook Up* on the USA.[10]

More work has however been done in popular history. It has been the Teds themselves who have sought to recover their past and of note is Ray Ferris and Julian Lloyd's book *The Teddy Boys*, published in 2013, and Chris Steele-Perkins and Richard Smith's photo history *The Teds*, from 2002.[11] The Ferris and Lloyd monograph is useful as a vast oral history of the Teds but obviously partisan for the most part. Most of what we know or understand about the Teds is primarily anecdotal, impressionistic and often the product of nostalgia. This is ironic as even a light sampling of the writings of the time reveals a deep interest in the Teds. Two studies are of particular note as they are heavily referenced in contemporary debates and are still used as the vital sources in our understanding of not only the Teds but of the emerging concern about delinquent youth in general in the UK. These are *The Delinquent Child* by Donald Ford, the Vice Chairman of the London County Council Children's Committee, published in 1957, and *The Insecure Offenders* by T. R. (Tosco) Fyvel (1961), a disciple and former colleague of George Orwell.[12]

The evolution of the label

To become a Ted was really a two-stage process: it entailed the young people themselves assuming a particular sartorial aesthetic and society naming them as such. There were two groups who championed the Edwardian look in the post-war period. The original Edwardians were young, recently demobilised fashion-conscious former officers of guards regiments who were part of what was a comprehensive attempt to restore some kind of high society amongst the traditional elites in post-war London. This phenomenon is well described in Frank Mort's monograph *Capital Affairs*.[13] In a photo-essay by Norman Parkinson entitled 'Back to Formality', young officers and city businessmen were shown sporting '*the new almost Edwardian [...] men's clothes [...] promoted as a reaction to the studied sloppiness of fashion between the wars*'.[14] The jackets were long to just above the knees, often incorporated high collars and were tailored to fit. As fashions changed, the original 'Edwardians' began to abandon this look, leaving the way clear for

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[8] Robert J CROSS, 'The Teddy Boy as Scapegoat', *Doshisha Studies in Language and Culture*, 1998, pp. 263-291.

[9] Pamela HORN, *Young Offenders: Juvenile Delinquency 1700-2000*, Stroud: Amberley, 2013; John MUNCIE, *Youth and Crime*, London: Sage, 2009 (3rd ed.).

[10] Mark FENEMORE, *Sex Thugs and Rock'nRoll*, Oxford: Berghahn, 2009; Glen ALTSCHULER, *All Shook Up*, Oxford University Press, 2003.

[11] Ray FERRIS & Julian LLOYD, *The Teddy Boys: A Concise History*, Preston: Milo, 2012; Chris STEELE-PERKINS & Richard SMITH, *The Teds*, Stockport: Dewi Lewis, 2002.

[12] Donald FORD, *The Delinquent Child*, London: Constable, 1957; T. R. FYVEL, *The Insecure Offenders*, London: Pelican 1961.

[13] Frank MORT, *Capital Affairs*, Yale University Press, 2010.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

others to adopt it. The young working-class men who would evolve into the Teds in the early 1950s appropriated, whether by accident or design, the drape jacket which the guards officers had had made for them. It was a uniform but it was an interactive and customisable uniform, part of a display, according to Mort, of '*flamboyant working class territorialism*'.[15] These were groups amongst whom visibility, class-consciousness, and location were key features. Gangs of Teds would be identified by their place of origin; for example, the Plough Boys had Clapham Commons as their territory. In almost all cases, these areas were associated with the proletariat and they were immediately identifiable by their dress. Territory and class had always figured highly pre-existing gang cultures but the stylised and often ostentatious garb of the Teds was an innovation.

There are conflicting accounts of the precise origins of the Teds. In their recent book on the Teddy Boys, Ferris and Lloyd have oral evidence that aspects of the style, notably the long drape jacket and the Tony Curtis style haircut, can be seen from mid-1951 onwards, which moves the Ted timeline back much earlier than the acknowledged moment when the 'New Edwardians' broke into public consciousness in July 1953.[16] The precise location of the first Teds is also disputed. Fyvel suggests that it is in the Elephant and Castle area of London that the style originally emerged.[17] Cohen argues that it was in North London around Haringey and Tottenham where the style of dress started to be noticed.[18] Irrespective of the actual eureka moment when a young working-class man somehow procured a probably second-hand Savile Row tailored long morning coat and fused it with a Boston-style haircut, what is indisputable is that the moment when the Teds went national was 2 July 1953. A fight between members of the Plough Boys, a gang from Clapham, and other youths culminated in the fatal stabbing of a young man by the name of John Beckley on the Common. After a trial at the Old Bailey in the autumn of 1953, one of the gang members, Michael John Davies, was found guilty and sentenced to death. He was not to be hanged as ultimately, after 93 days in a condemned cell, the Home Secretary gave him a reprieve. He nonetheless served seven years before being released in 1960. From the first press reports, some of the Plough Boys appeared to be very exotically dressed, wearing clothes distinctive from the spiv suits more commonly associated with the working-class toughs of the immediate post-war years.[19] Their style of apparel was referred to as 'New Edwardian'. At the Davies trail, witnesses described the boys who dressed in the style as 'Teddy boys' or simply 'Teds', the first time that the label was used to describe this subculture. As a result of this, the Plough Boys have been lost to history but Teddy Boys as a label quickly became iconic and henceforth associated with criminality.

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[15] *Ibid.*, p. 107.
[16] Ray FERRIS & Julian LLOYD, *op. cit.*
[17] T. R. FYVEL, *op cit*, p. 52.
[18] Stanley COHEN & Paul ROCK, *art. cit.*, p. 289.
[19] Spivs were young criminals from the postwar years strongly associated with the black market in rationed goods. The attire of the spiv was adapted from the demobilisation suit or the 'zootsuit' given to former servicemen on leaving the forces, which had been popularised by members of the American forces garrisoned in the UK.

Blame the Teds

Murder as a feature of the forms of deviance and delinquency associated with the Teds was relatively rare. Arguably it is in lower levels of criminality that the Teds were more prominently involved, most notably in public order offences, assault and petty forms of larceny. Theft may well have been the route to the unique dress style of the group. According to one of the origin myths surrounding the Teds, a shoplifting gang called the Forty Knives, on a visit to the West End of London, took a shine to the Edwardian jackets they saw in the windows of some of the shops visited and stole one or two. The newspapers of the 1950s recount many incidents of theft, brawling, vandalism, criminal damage and, in common with all moral panics, there is a tendency to write-in an association with the predominant folk devil. Eyewitness accounts often speak of 'Teds' or 'Teddy Boys' or youths in Edwardian jackets at crime scenes and the media attributed a wide range of deviant behaviour to the Teds. *The Times* of 2 August 1958 reported that wages totalling £400 were stolen by youths described by witnesses as 'Teddy Boys'.[20] A youngster carved T.B. for 'Teddy Boy' on another boy's arm at a west London school in June 1954.[21] Theft, torture and carrying offensive weapons were only part of the behaviour reported. One report also related that incitement to violence was another manifestation of deviance after a man identified as a 'leading Ted' was fined £30 at Reading for assault occasioning actual bodily harm, despite the fact that he had himself not committed the felony but instead had '*egged on from a safe distance [...] his "Teddy Boy" associates*'.[22] These are only a sample of many reported incidents that appear to give an indication of the breath of criminality associated with the Teds.

If there was a form of deviance that the Teds were to become specifically synonymous with, then it was the smashing up of cinemas. The reason for this form of delinquency was due to the popularity of rock 'n' roll. The track 'Rock around the Clock' by Bill Hailey and the Comets in the film *Blackboard Jungle* in 1956 introduced rock 'n' roll to youth around the world. It was an immediate sensation in the UK, drawing hoards of teenagers to picture houses. The resulting increase in cinema receipts convinced producers to commission and rush out a whole genre of movies with rock 'n' roll stars singing and acting in them. Disorderly conduct at cinemas was occasionally due to the crush whilst queuing to get admission but it was inside the venues, it was said, where most trouble occurred. Youngsters danced in the aisles, on the tops of the seats and, in the frenzy generated by what Harry Hopkins called '*mass produced delirium*'[23], some teenagers took out flick knives and slashed the seats or other revellers. At least that was what was reported in the press. The media in 1956 referred to it as the 'rock around the clock riots'. The film was banned in a number of locations, including Bristol, Ipswich, Blackburn, Birmingham and Gateshead. But it was for the most part sheer sensationalism and hyperbole. There were disturbances at only 25 out of the 400 cinemas that showed the film.[24] But again the image stuck and Teds were to be carefully monitored any

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[20] *The Times*, 2 August 1958, p.4.
[21] *The Times,* 25 June 1954, p. 3
[22] *The Times*, 21 August 1956, p. 5.
[23] Harry HOPKINS, *The New Look*, London: Secker & Warburg, 1964, p. 433.
[24] David KYNASTON, *Family Britain*, London: Bloomsbury, 2009, p. 655.

time they went near cinemas. An important side effect of the rock around the clock riots was to merge youth subculture with popular music. The Teds were not created by rock 'n' roll but their enthusiastic championing of it would mean that 'deviant' behaviour such as delinquency became associated with popular music.

From the very outset, there was a very clear public association made between the New Edwardians and criminality, starting with the Clapham murder. Simultaneously, there was empirical evidence of a substantial increase in juvenile-related crime. The United Nations Second Congress on the Prevention of Crime in 1960 recorded that between 1938 and 1958 there was an increase in indictable offences committed by young people (those between the ages of 8 and 21) of 81%; a rise in cases of larceny of 61%; and of breaking and entering of 28%. Interestingly, offences against the person rose by only 2%. Of the total number of both adult and juvenile offences, youngsters represented a growing proportion of the whole: accounting for 57% of all larceny offences in the UK, 68% of all cases of breaking and entering, and 35% of all sexual offences. This is despite the fact that those age groups by 1961 made up only 20% of the entire population, meaning that young people were over-represented by a factor of between 3 and 7 times in indictable offences.[25] It was widely believed that this rise in criminality must in some way be attributable to the lifestyle and activities of the Teds. This is the vital moment where the Teddy Boys move from an object of criminal curiosity to being a criminal class. Yet, there is no study of any sort that has been able to directly associate the Teds with this general rise in juvenile crime. In the absence of hard evidence, there is only speculation and a readiness to jump to conclusions, with few defenders but plenty of people willing to brand 'deviant' an entire subculture.

Moral entrepreneurs and the Ted scare

Howard Becker defined those who are the main protagonists in the labelling of deviants as 'moral entrepreneurs'.[26] In the labelling of the Teds, there was a significant number of different groups and individuals who contributed to the debate, from sections of the intelligentsia to those in political parties, local government officials, police, figures from the judiciary, the medical profession, the military, academia, voluntary organisations, and even the United Nations. It is important to note that not all of those who contributed were hostile to the Teds, or jumped on a bandwagon to use the Edwardians as scapegoats for the failings of others, or a Trojan horse to push forward a particular political agenda, although many of them did.

De-teddifying the Teddy Boys: politicians and the Teds

Throughout the controversies over the delinquent behaviour of Teddy Boys and other incorrigible youths, there was discussion of strategies needed to remedy the disorder caused by them. As the then Home Secretary, R. A. Butler, put it, it was

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[25] THE UNITED NATIONS SECOND CONGRESS ON THE PREVENTION OF CRIME, *New forms of Juvenile Delinquency*, A/Conf.17/7, 1960, p. 9.
[26] Howard BECKER, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, London: Simon and Schuster, 1997, p. 179.

necessary to '*de-teddify*' the Teddy Boys.[27] Solutions proposed were generally punitive. They entailed sending Teddy Boys to Borstal, imposing financial penalties and attempting to reintroduce corporal punishment (on the part of some notable Conservative Party activists). But there were also less punitive solutions proposed, such as measures to combat idleness, which involved schools, the military, as well as voluntary and religious organisations. The Albemarle Committee in 1959 proposed that the Youth Service created in the 1930s should be revamped, given access to new funding for the training of volunteers, and facilities to lure away youngsters from the temptations of the Teds.[28]

In March 1958, Geoffrey Stevens, the Conservative Member of Parliament for Portsmouth Langstone, introduced a private members bill amending the Metropolitan Police Act 1839. It sought to increase the fines for those found guilty of breach of the peace in the capital from 40s to £10 for the first offence and £20 for a second. He made no apology that he '*had the teddy boys in mind*' when he came up with the idea.[29] The bill would become known as the 'anti-teddy boys bill'. In opening his speech he drew attention to the fact that prosecutions under the act had risen by more than a third in three years from 1955 to 1957 from 3,261 to 4,294.[30] He argued that the 40s limit was 'a lot in 1839 now not so'.[31] It represented little more than a day's wages, he said. Indeed the paltry nature of the fine and the ease with which it was paid made it 'something to boast about' for those of an 'exhibitionist mentality'.[32] The higher fines he proposed would be substantial enough to 'deter the potential wrong doer and protect the public'[33] by delivering 'a quite healthy shock'.[34] His bill was given widespread support in the Commons, especially by the Conservatives, but there were some who did not think it went far enough. One MP on his own side in the House called it a '*two-penny, halfpenny measure*', arguing that it should be extended beyond the Metropolitan Police Authority and, taking the recommendations of the recent Wolfenden Committee as a model, that prostitutes should also be fined £20 if found soliciting (this latter proposal was made into law the following year in the 1959 Sexual Offences Act).[35] The Heywood and Royston MP, J. A. Leavey, while supporting the bill also broached the idea of corporal punishment '*for this sort of offence*' but there was no support signalled for such an idea, at least at this point. The opposition Labour Party spokesman, Barnett Janner, tentatively endorsed the bill but argued that there should be a wider bill that also included a section on offensive weapons, especially 'flick-knives' which were particularly associated with the Teds.[36] The Bill was to successfully make its way through parliament with Government support and was passed into law on 16 May 1958.

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[27] *The Times*, 10 October 1958, p. 7.
[28] HOUSE OF COMMONS, *The Youth Service in England and Wales*, Cmnd. 929, 1959-60, p. 108.
[29] HANSARD, *House of Commons Debates*, vol. 583, col. 1579, 7 March 1958.
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] *Ibid.*, 1581.
[32] *Ibid.*, 1582.
[33] *Ibid.*, 1581.
[34] *Ibid.*, 1586.
[35] *Ibid.*, 1616.
[36] *Ibid.*, 1594.

Throughout the era of the Ted scare there were periodic calls for the reintroduction of corporal punishment as a response to increasing anxiety about unruly youth. It had been abolished in 1948 via the Criminal Justice Act, which had also ended penal servitude and hard labour in prisons in England and Wales. Demands were to reach a peak for the reinstatement of birching in the aftermath of the race riots in Nottingham and Notting Hill in the late summer of 1958. There was a resolution presented to the annual conference of the Conservative Party in that year calling for the return of corporal punishment. Its supporters argued that 'the cat'[37] would act as a deterrent, as '*would-be criminals would think twice before acting*'.[38] Additionally, they argued that the shame of the sentence would deflate the ego of '*these cocksure young men*' and make it impossible for them '*to go back and face their friends*'.[39] One concluded, '*let us bear in mind a flogging in youth may save a hanging later on*'. Also pro-birching delegates attacked the juvenile prison system for an alleged lack of deterrence, saying that delinquents did not mind a prison sentence and some boasted of it. The Home Secretary, Rab Butler, replied to the clamour by first pointing out that crimes of robbery with violence had in fact fallen since the abolition of corporal punishment with only 898 cases in 1957 compared to 978 in 1948.[40] He rejected calls for the reintroduction of flogging, saying he was not going to put the clock back 100 years.[41] He was however in favour of the appropriate use of corporal punishment in schools and by parents. Butler did acknowledge some shortcomings in the borstal and prison system, proposing that there should be the expansion of a new kind of detention centre in which '*everything had to be done on the double to give the maximum of hard work and the minimum of amusement*'.[42] These centres had '*the objective (of) de-teddifying the Teddy Boys*'.[43] This tough measure had the effect of rallying the conference against the re-introduction of corporal punishment but it was not the last attempt to do so.

Butler returned to the issues of delinquency and corporal punishment in 1960 and 1961. He commissioned the Home Office advisory council on the treatment of offenders to address the issue of corporal punishment.[44] At the same time, Butler received the report of The Committee on Children and Young People, chaired by Viscount Ingleby, which had been charged in 1956 with reviewing the law as it related to juvenile delinquents.[45] Both of these documents would feed ultimately into the 1961 *Criminal Justice Act*.[46] *The Ingleby Report* would be the more influential of the two, mainly because its impact was not just in relation to delinquency but also to

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[37] Abbreviation for the 'cat o' nine tails', a multi-tailed whip commonly used in corporal punishment.
[38] *The Times*, 10 October 1958, p. 7.
[39] *Ibid*.
[40] *Ibid*.
[41] *Ibid.*, p. 12.
[42] *Ibid.*, p. 7.
[43] *Ibid*.
[44] HOUSE OF COMMONS, *Corporal Punishment: Report of the Advisory Council on the Treatment of Offenders*, Cmnd. 1213, 1960-61.
[45] HOUSE OF COMMONS, *Report of the Committee on Children and Young Persons*, Cmnd. 1191, 1959-60.
[46] *Criminal Justice Act 1961* (9& 10 Eliz. 2 ch.39).

the whole youth justice system and the protection of children regarded as being at risk or in danger. The report acknowledged that recent public concern and anxiety about youth disorder had been the stimulus to the committee and although it did not have anything specific to say about the role played by the 'Ted Scare' in shaping public concern, there can be no doubt that by youth disorder it was the Edwardians who were being thought of.[47] Many of its recommendations would form part of the 1961 Criminal Justice Act. It did reserve some space for the issue of corporal punishment but it took no clear stance on it, only mentioning that just one witness out of one hundred and fifty one had advocated it and also that the Home office advisory committee was working concurrently on the topic.[48]

The advisory committee on corporal punishment was convened to respond to popular pressure seemingly in favour of its return as well as concerns that '*new crimes and criminals had arisen since its abolition in 1948*'.[49] The report addressed the issue in terms of the reasons for an apparent rise in crimes of violence since abolition, the possible deterrent effect of restoration, and the place of corporal punishment in the judicial system. The committee accepted that there had been a notable increase in the number of crimes of violence during the 1950s, from 2,370 in 1948 to 13,876 in 1959. But the committee questioned the idea that prior to abolition the threat and the experience of corporal punishment had acted as a deterrent and therefore had been a major factor in the lower instance of crime with violence. First, it pointed out that only a very small proportion of convicted offenders were flogged as part of a sentence up to the late 1940s and that the birching juveniles had effectively ceased by 1938.[50] Indeed, if not for the intervention of the Second World War, corporal punishment would have been abolished in 1939 under the planned Criminal Justice Act. The committee also drew attention to the evidence produced by Cadogan that a study of offender behaviour and recidivism noted no noticeable divergence in re-offending between those sentenced to custodial and corporal punishments. But the committee was aware that despite these arguments there was considerable public opinion support for flogging, especially of juvenile delinquents. Butler accepted the committee's recommendation that '*there was no evidence that corporal punishment is an especially effective deterrent to those who received it or to others*'.[51] He was able to resist a further attempt to introduce corporal punishment during the passage of the bill. An amendment was put forward by the Ayr MP Sir Thomas Moore to allow the courts to pass a sentence of corporal punishment for a second offence. Gerald Nabarro, the MP for Kidderminster, supporting the amendment said, '*I believe that the hide of the thug is tender and receptive. A policy of whack the thug should be our policy, and I believe that it would inflict a sharp and salutary lesson*'.[52] The amendment was defeated. For those wishing to reverse the abolition of corporal punishment, the Teds provided a lurid and menacing example of what happens when you spare the rod.

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[47] *Report of the Committee on Children and Young Persons*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
[48] *Ibid.*, p. 113.
[49] *Report of the Advisory Council on the Treatment of Offenders*, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
[50] *Ibid*.
[51] *Ibid.*, p. 27.
[52] HANSARD, *House of Commons Debates*, vol. 638, col. 72, 11 April 1961.

Bridging the gap: national and Youth Service

Beyond punitive sanctions, there were other ideas advanced to address the anti-social behaviour associated with the Teds, such as military service and Youth Service. The idea of bringing the Teds into organisations which would provide an alternative to roaming the streets, engage their interests but also pass on the values of order, citizenship and obeying the law was much discussed throughout the 1950s. All recognised that the Teds and the larger youth population of the UK needed to be civilised in some way or involved in public service to ensure that the age of affluence did not become one of selfishness, hedonism and nihilism. There was an additional and unique contemporary characteristic of the notion of service as a civilising strategy and that was the notion of 'the gap'. This was the period, for boys, between leaving school at 15 and compulsory military service at 17 when they were removed from formal control influences. It was an issue of such concern that the King George's Jubilee Trust commissioned a study into the phenomenon in 1951 that was published in 1954 as *Citizens of To-morrow*.[53]

National service was viewed by contemporaries as both a cause and a potential solution to the problem of the Teds and of juvenile delinquency. It was introduced in 1948 as a replacement to compulsory military service which had served to conscript all males aged 18 or over into the armed forces for the duration of the wartime emergency. The new form of National Service, which was initially to last 18 months, was extended due to the Korean War. It covered all men aged 17 to 21, except those in clearly-defined categories such as reserved occupations, students and those from Northern Ireland. Donald Ford, in his 1957 study *The Delinquent Child*, argued that due to the creation of a period between leaving school and doing National Service between the ages of 15 and 17, young men saw their '*horizons contracted*' and they '*felt cramped and cut off from adult life*': the result was an interregnum which led to a '*very purposeless life*' marked by '*anti-social behaviour screwed up to a hysterical pitch*'.[54] However, Ford went on to argue that as a result of National Service '*large parts of Teddy Boy behaviour disappear*'. Conscription was thus thought to provide the means by which formerly anti-social adolescents were civilised. Fyvel, who provided anecdotal evidence that some Teddy Boys tended to be changed by two years away in the forces, also made this observation about the civilising character of National Service. The Albemarle Report in 1960 called National Service a '*shutter between the mind of an adolescent and his adult future*'.[55] In Parliament, MPs and Lords also extolled the role of the military in transforming Teds into citizens. Lord Auckland, speaking in the House of Lords in 1958, said, that '*they have been under a good sergeant major who has made them have their hair cut and made them wash themselves. They may not have liked it at the time, but when they come out a good many of them settle down to an ordered life*'.[56] Without military service what means could there then be to inculcate a sense of citizenship and order on youth? The Albemarle Report best expressed the situation: '*Now that young people will not be called away for service in the armed*

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[53] KING GEORGE'S JUBILEE TRUST, *Citizens of To-morrow*, London, 1954.
[54] Donald FORD, *op. cit.*, pp. 160-161.
[55] *The Youth Service in England and Wales*, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
[56] HANSARD, *House of Commons Debates*, vol. 213, col. 253, 15 December 1958.

forces, the question poses itself whether they will find uninterrupted development any easier and assume their responsibilities as adults more readily'.[57]

Throughout the 1950s there were further anxieties that the main forms of socialisation aside from school—family and church—were not addressing delinquency successfully. As already noted, the wartime experience of children without fathers and mothers working long shifts in war work was often pointed to as a cause of anti-social behaviour. Some church leaders also pointed to the lack of religious training as a further contributory factor.[58] Although it could be argued that as the decade proceeded families were more stable and church attendance was to recover, disorder did not decline but rather accelerated. Finding new ways to engage youth and build community and citizenship became a priority. There were organisations which already sought to engage youth such as the Scouts and the Boys' Brigade and they remained successful throughout the era. The Scouts Association was however wary of being involved in reaching out to the Teddy Boys. Speaking at a conference in 1959, Lord Rowallan said there were very few men in the scout association who possessed sufficient personality to redeem the Teddy Boys.[59] There were new initiatives rolled out to meet the challenge such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme launched in 1956. The organisational head of the scheme, Sir John Hunt, was confident that, if the scheme succeeded, fewer boys would want to put on Teddy Boy suits.[60]

The main effort in transforming the attitudes of youth was to be via the Youth Service. Formed in 1939 by the Ministry of Education, its purpose was, in the words of Sir John Mauds, the former permanent secretary of the Ministry, 't*o offer young people in their leisure time opportunities of various kinds [... to] develop their personal resources of body, mind and spirit and thus better equip themselves to live the life of mature, creative and responsible members of a free society'*.[61] It had by the middle of the 1950s somewhat fallen on hard times in the face of the clamour over the so-called youth problem. The Ministry commissioned a report (mentioned above) into the service with the objective '*to review the contribution [...] the Youth Service [...] can make in assisting young people to play their part in the life of the community'*.[62] The chair of the committee was the Duchess of Albemarle, a former chairwoman of the Women's Institute. It included as members a senior pediatrician, Professor A. G Watkins, English professor and author of the influential work *The Uses of Literacy* Richard Hoggart, and Pearl Jephcott, senior research assistant at the London School of Economics and author of the study of youth organisations, *Some Young People* (1954).[63]

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[57] *The Youth Service in England and Wales*, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
[58] *The Times*, 15 October 1958, p.7.
[59] *The Times*, 15 April 1959, p. 4.
[60] *The Times*, 27 June, 1956, p. 6.
[61] *The Youth Service in England and Wales*, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
[62] *Ibid.*, p. 1.
[63] Richard HOGGART, *The Uses of Literacy*, London: Chatto and Winduss, 1957; Pearl JEPHCOTT, *Some Young People*, Crow's Nest: Allen & Unwin, 1954.

Aside from its conclusions that will be discussed later, the work is notable for the way in which it defines the problems facing youth and the conditions that prevailed for them in the late 1950s. In one respect, the biggest challenge was the increasing number of young people in the population, what the report called 'the bulge' with 3.4m adolescents in 1957, which they projected to rise to nearly 4m by the start of the 1970s.[64] There were different challenges specifically relating to boys and girls. For males, the biggest change was to be the abolition of the National Service. Each year 200,000 youths drafted into the military and the Youth Service would, in the words of the report have, to find '*challenge and adventure to replace National Service*'.[65] For female teenagers, the most pressing concern was '*the shorter time between school and marriage [... meaning] less time for maturity and technical competence at her job as home-maker*'.[66]

The issue of juvenile delinquency was addressed and again there were some interesting and insightful observations made. The report identified '*a gulf between the young and the law abiding older generation of society*'.[67] Part of the generation gap involved '*the normal questionings of adolescence*' but added to this were contemporary stresses brought on by the global situation, excessive public attention on the behaviour of young people and the fact that the current generation of young people was well fed, healthy and maturing early. The unique situation for the youth of the 1950s was affluence: they wanted to take advantage of prosperity and widening choices and opportunities. This liberal approach clashed with the innate conservatism of older people who had only recently found security. Young people had more disposable income: Mark Abrams, in his ground-breaking study of *Teenage Consumers* (1959), contrasted the want of the 1930s, when the income of a young worker was 26 shillings per week, with the seeming abundance of the 1950s, when on average the working male youngster earned more than £5 per week and after deductions had more than £3 pounds of discretionary spending.[68] Yet, despite this economic power, the committee argued that adolescents felt that they had money but no status.[69] The problem they identified was that '*young people are greedy for adult status. A sense of adult responsibility is quite another thing*'.[70]

This is where the Youth Service would come in. Its aim was '*not to remove tensions so as to reach towards some hypothetical condition of adjustment to individual or social life. It is towards ensuring that those tensions [...] shall not submerge the better possibilities of children during their adolescence*'.[71] It put forward a series of themes which it hoped would achieve this objective. It promoted 'association', 'challenge' and 'preparation for adult life'. '*Association*' emphasised that young people together in groups could collectively share experiences and build a sense of community. '*Challenge*' was regarded as important as it would address the '*humdrum*' inevitabilities of adult life in which it seemed that their future was

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[64] *The Youth Service in England and Wales*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
[65] *Ibid.*, p. 14.
[66] *Ibid.*, p. 15.
[67] *Ibid.*, p. 17.
[68] Mark ABRAMS, *The Teenage Consumer*, London Press Exchange, 1959, pp. 1-3.
[69] *The Youth Service in England and Wales*, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
[70] *Ibid.*, p. 59.
[71] *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

predestined towards banality and conformity. Also highlighted was the need for help *'in the search for values, values which can inform their lives and give them meaning'*.[72] This idea was controversial as it could imply brainwashing but the committee sought to reassure its readership that this would not be about preaching or indoctrination. Alongside public affairs, young people would be encouraged to discuss employment but also more domestic concerns, such as preparation for marriage and home making ('adult life').

Despite the deep philosophical and sociological discussions in which the committee engaged, it recommended some rather pedestrian changes to the service, most notably an increase in the number of paid youth workers, massive investment in infrastructure through more youth clubs and an overall ten-year plan to reach out to the increasing numbers of young people who felt alienated and disenfranchised. It argued for greater liaison between local authorities, voluntary organisations and other stakeholders. In essence, what was proposed was a revamp of the existing service, though its overall objectives would be more intellectually sophisticated and highbrow, referred to as a 'cultural apprenticeship'. Its means to achieve these lofty aims consisted in little more that extra youth centres and ping-pong tables. The new youth centres would be approved and funded as a result of the report but, just as the fruits of this committee were appearing, the Teds had already pretty much disappeared from public view. As is so often the case with a long process of enquiry, the final report was overtaken by events.

Teds and the global youth problem

In 1960 in London the United Nations convened the Second Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders which would focus on the maladjustment of Youth. Since 1946 the UN had been focusing special attention on the issue of juvenile delinquency. There had been in the first half of the 1950s a series of regional conferences but in 1955 the first global conference was held in Geneva. The next would be held in London. It met to draw together existing scholarly and governmental expertise on the nature of the problems of youth, especially as they related to the developed world. A series of working documents was prepared for the congress by eminent figures from the judiciary, social services and law enforcement agencies. There was to be a series of plenary sessions for the delegates to discuss the issues and to try a come to a consensus regarding the scale and character of juvenile delinquency. For the wives of the delegates there was a special Ladies Programme of events in parallel to the sessions which were a strange mix of fashion, shopping and visits to borstals and approved schools.[73]

The UN report was written by Wolf Middendorff, a senior judge from West Germany.[74] The Teds would play a prominent role in the report as the distinctively British contribution to this major social problem. Much of what Middendorff quotes in the report is directly lifted from Donald Ford's study. He noted that the general

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[72] *Ibid.*, p. 59.
[73] THE UNITED NATIONS SECOND CONGRESS ON THE PREVENTION OF CRIME, *op. cit.*
[74] *Ibid.*

discussion of British juvenile crime was, compared to other national studies, rather disappointing and only served to show how superficial and simplistic British policy-making was in relation to juvenile crime. There was more knowledge about the scale of non-British adolescent deviant behaviour than about the homegrown variety. Furthermore, there was little real analysis of the role being played by sexual delinquency, criminal organised gangs, the graduation of young delinquents into adult felons, and also of the emerging concerns about drug and alcohol habituation amongst youth.

The stigma of being a Ted

As a result of the moral panic generated by media, political and cultural figures, it would become increasing difficult to be a Ted. Occasionally there were those who sought to try and present a more nuanced vision of the Teds and their world. In 1954, *Picture Post* sought to learn the truth about the Teddy Boys. This was perhaps reparation for being instrumental in the original demonisation of the Edwardians when in 1953 it featured a photo-spread centred around a well-known local hood in all his Teddy Boy finery. The journalist spent the evening at the local *palais de danse* in Tottenham observing the Teds.[75] Rather than emerging as a riotous, amoral and dangerous grouping, the piece portrays them as the very picture of manners, probity and to some extent modesty. Showy certainly, but more peacocks than fighting cockerels. The article concludes with an acknowledgement that there is a bad element but that this has been exaggerated. In addition to the visit to the dance there was also a commentary written by an anonymous psychiatrist analysing in generally sympathetic terms the problem, if there was one, of the Teddy Boy.[76] The Labour MP, George Isaacs, opening a canteen for young people in June 1955 in the bastille of the Ted Revolution, the Elephant and Castle in London, said that '*Teddy Boys are youngsters with youthful spirits who like to have their own clothes. There are bad ones among them here and there but you will find some darn fine lads in Edwardian clothes going to the boys brigade and the sea cadets*'.[77] He concluded his address by trying to rebrand the Teds as the 'New Elizabethans' (it did not stick). There are also a few reports of charitable activities initiated by the Teds. *The Times* reported in July 1958 on a fete at the pump room gardens in Leamington Spa which raised £1,000 for the league of hospitals' friends. The event was partly to raise money but was also part of an effort to wipe out the stigma associated with the Edwardians. As one participant declared, '*we will show that we are not the layabouts which the older generation think we are*'.[78] Some Teds sought in late 1958 to create an association to promote a more sympathetic image but it was a flop when only 22 turned up.[79]

More often than not, Teds were treated as pariahs. There is some evidence of stigmatisation, social exclusion and, in the case of the 1958 race riots in London and Nottingham, they were singled out for blame in starting and exacerbating the unrest.

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[75] *Picture Post*, 10 October 1953, p. 20.
[76] *Ibid.*, p. 22.
[77] *The Times*, 21 June 1955, p. 12.
[78] *The Times*, 21 July 1958, p. 3.
[79] *The Times*, 31 October 1958, p. 19.

One example of stigmatisation was brought to the attention of Parliament in an adjournment debate in the House of Commons in January 1962 where a young man applying for a job in the Public health laboratory in Preston was rejected for the post. He was sent a rejection letter, which said, that '*I regret to inform you that your application for a job in this laboratory was not successful. Your application academically was the best, but your "winkle-pickers"[80] and Teddy-Boy trousers were sufficient for us to give the job to the next best applicant*'.[81]

It is impossible to quantify how widespread this type of discrimination was. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence of various types of actions to keep the Teds out of so-called respectable establishments but they are more notable for their absurdity than anything else. For example, Teddy Boys seeking to enjoy rambling in the Peak District were turned away from guesthouses and other establishments as they were regarded as the unwelcome 'rakings from hell' in the words of the local parish council leader.[82] On the back of the epidemic of cinema and dancehall trashing that accompanied the showings of the film *Rock around the Clock* in the summer of 1956, the Blackpool Tower Company, amongst many other establishments, as already discussed, banned the movie to keep the Teddy Boys away from the resort.[83] There was therefore a fairly diverse number of responses to the Teds and attempts at separation and isolation of these deviants.

Teddy Boys and the issue of race

Of all the accusations against the Teds, arguably the most contentious and damaging related to the issue of race. In August and September 1958 in Nottingham and in Notting Hill in West London serious disorder erupted. The violence was perpetrated by members of white gangs against individuals from the afro-Caribbean community. The riot in Notting Hill was largely due to the reaction by locals to a domestic dispute that took place in the street between a white female sex worker and her husband who came from the West Indies. Violence flared and for the next two nights the area saw a series of assaults and destruction of property. After the neighbourhood had quietened down, 55 people were arrested and held at Marylebone police station. The event proved to be so contentious and problematic that in order to help pacify the afro-Caribbean community, at the invitation of the UK government, Dr Hugh Cummins, the Prime Minister of Barbados, made an emergency visit to London and the scene of the unrest. Other outsiders were attracted to the locality, most notably Sir Oswald Moseley and members of the Union Movement, a successor group to the British Union of Fascists.

The association of the Teds with the riots can be observed via newspaper reports at the time which carried quotes from those injured in the disturbances that claimed that Teddy Boys had attacked them. One man, Ronald Sinclair, claimed that

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[80] Winkle-pickers were a form of men's shoes popular at the time with very pointed toes that were said to resemble the needle handed out at fishmongers to help eat shellfish.
[81] HANSARD, *House of Commons Debates*, col. 556, 25 January 1962.
[82] *The Times*, 4 September 1957, p. 12.
[83] *The Times*, 7 September 1956, p. 6.

he had had been set upon by seven of them.[84] The chief constable of Nottingham, Captain Popkess, attributed the violence to '*irresponsible teddy boys*'.[85] Prime Minister Cummins added to this view, saying, '*we feel that the trouble is the result of gangster type Teddy Boys and probably fascism*'.[86] It was not just those on the ground who saw the Teds as the primary offenders. The leading sociologist, B. R. Wilson, writing in *The Times*, argued that '*the real causes appear to be principally in the boredom and frustrations experienced by our own Teddy Boys. Coloured people are simply a convenient and often defenceless target for the aggression arising from mass-frustration of this kind*'.[87]

Writing in 2010 for his monograph *Capital Affairs*, Mort argued that it was not just frustration that compelled the Teds to act. The intervention by the Teddy Boys in the fight between a white prostitute and her black husband, which had sparked the riot, was part of the informal policing of '*white women when they crossed the sexual boundaries of the colour line*'.[88] It was therefore an attempt to restore the racial order by ensuring the defence of white womanhood. This is a hugely elaborate and speculative interpretation; it assumes that one prominent example was representative of the actions of all the Teds. The empirical evidence for this conclusion is scant, yet it is not without attraction as an interpretation as it offers a very exotic vision of the Edwardians as proletarian moral enforcers.

The portrayal of the Teds as chief protagonists in the riots of 1958 provided the final ingredient in labelling the Teds as a deviant pariah subculture. Defenders of the Teddy Boys such as Ferris and Lord argued that, although not totally innocent, '*the Teds once again provided a convenient scapegoat with which the British establishment was able to deflect the problem of institutionalised racism that was without doubt endemic throughout the whole of society*'.[89] The weight of political, diplomatic and media opinion in identifying the troubles with the Teds was made more credible by the pre-existing stigma associated with them. The labelling of the Teds throughout the decade of the 1950s made them, irrespective of their actual culpability, an easy *aunt sally* to be knocked down. For the reputation of the Teds, as Ferris and Lord concluded, 'mud sticks' and the association with racism proved difficult to shift.[90] This is despite the fact that there is documented evidence of multi-ethnic gangs of Teds in both London and Manchester.[91] A further indication of how deeply embedded the caricature of the racist Ted became can be seen in post-1958 popular cultural representations of them. For example, in literature, the chronicler of the London beatnik scene Colin MacInnes drew heavily on the Notting Hill Riots in his 1959 book *Absolute Beginners*, highlighting the perceived racism of the Teds. Also in 1959 was the motion picture *Sapphire* directed by Basil Dearden which again had a racist Teddy Boy as the main antagonist, reinforcing the image and the association of the Teds with racism.

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[84] *The Times*, 2 September 1958, p. 7.
[85] *The Times*, 2 August 1958, p. 4.
[86] *The Times*, 6 September 1958, p. 8.
[87] *The Times*, 5 September 1958, p. 11.
[88] Frank MORT, *op. cit.*, p. 135.
[89] Ray FERRIS & Julian LLOYD, *op. cit.*, p. 399.
[90] *Ibid*.
[91] *Ibid*.

Conclusion

The labelling of the Teds was crucial in shaping the nature of their threat to the social order. The name itself would outlast the original Teddy Boys and become a synonym for all forms of youth deviance in the 1950s. This process culminated in the Teds being blamed for race riots in Nottingham and London in 1958. Some politicians, seeking to roll back liberal developments in the criminal justice system, most notably the abolition of corporal punishment in 1948, attempted to exploit the disorder associated with the Teds. The Teds themselves would become increasingly ostracised, as there is evidence of social exclusion and victimisation of the young men by employers and others in authority. They were to initiate an era of cyclical moral panics relating to youth, popular music and disorder. But it is also important to see the response to the Teds as not exclusively an example of knee-jerk politics: there was plenty of substance behind the anxieties, as there were some Teddy Boys who were undoubtedly responsible for some serious crimes and the general manner and disposition of the Teds could be anti-social. However, to identify delinquency as the exclusive fault of the Edwardians was too simplistic an interpretation. It legitimated unsympathetic and punitive measures to deal with the problems rather than addressing the genuine grievances about their status and situation. As the example of the race riots in 1958 demonstrated, blaming the Teds turned out to be very counterproductive as it concealed the very real problems which were more and more part of the lived experience of ethnic minorities. Blaming the Teds did not address the deep divisions between the poorest of both the indigenous and the immigrant communities; it did not help to deal with anxieties about policing or about the abuse of tenants in poor rented housing by some slum landlords. Labelling the deviant and casting the Teds out into the wilderness may have soothed short-term demands for action but they left substantial and deep societal problems unresolved.

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