

History

Life in the 1960s - Lesson 1 of 6

The Swinging Sixties

What kind of stories can be told about the Sixties?

Mr Wallace



The Swinging Sixties

In April 1966, Time magazine was dedicated to 'London: the Swinging City'. This put into print what had become clear across the world: that London was the capital of cool. For millions of young Britons, London represented an exciting change from the past, with new fashion, art, music and lifestyles. This image of the 1960s as an exciting and cool decade has lasted to the present day. However, it doesn't fully represent what really took place in this important decade. Many historians - and people who lived through it - would say it's just a **stereotype**, a story that we tell ourselves about the Sixties. So what *is* the stereotype?



The Baby Boom

The 'Swinging Sixties' is centred around a new generation of young people that became known as the Baby Boom generation. These were the people who were born after World War Two. By the Sixties these people were teenagers and young adults. Throughout the 1950s Britain had grown more confident and **optimistic** as it put the war behind it and looked forward to a new, modern age. For example, healthcare had improved with the new National Health Service (NHS), and technology was improving. The world these youngsters grew up in was a world that was different to what their parents had experienced. They did not experience the hardship and difficulties of the war, and had a positive attitude that welcomed all things modern.



London

London was an especially young city, with up to 40% of its population being under 25 years old. These 'baby boomers' were helped by a growing economy and rising wages. They had more **disposable income** to spend, and wanted to spend it on things that interested them, like music, fashion and art. Their tastes were different, too - bolder, more colourful and especially influenced by American culture, such as music and art. London was especially famous for its fashion, with youngsters moving towards Carnaby Street in Soho, or King's Road, to try new fashion.



Changes in fashion

New fashion designers were making clothes for men and women that were less traditional and more exciting than ever before. The most famous of these was Mary Quant who transformed the fashion world with modern, exciting designs which broke away from the past. Her designs were bright, clear and simple, and she wanted young people to have their own identity that was different to their parents. Her most famous creation was the mini-skirt, which was part of 'the look' of the Sixties. This has remained one of the most iconic Sixties items.



Sporting Success

It wasn't only music, art and fashion where Britain seemed to be at the centre of the world in the 1960s. In **1966**, the England football team won the World Cup for the first and only time. It was won at Wembley Stadium in London. For many England fans, this represents the very peak of following the sport, and is regularly brought up whenever England fail to win football matches. The stars of 1966, such as Jack Charlton, Bobby Moore and Martin Peters, became some of the most famous footballers of all time. It is looking back at the success of the Sixties that encourages many people to view the time period in such a fond, positive way.



Glossary

Disposable income - The amount of money someone has to spend on non-essentials

Optimistic - A feeling of being hopeful about the future

Stereotype - An oversimplified idea about something



Questions

1. What magazine called London 'the Swinging City'?
2. What generation of people became teenagers and young adults in the Sixties?
3. How did Mary Quant affect the fashion world?
4. What sporting success encourages people to look back fondly at the Sixties?
- 5. Challenge:** Why were the **attitudes** of young people important in creating the 'Swinging Sixties'?

