# Rock as a Rebellion: How America Lost Faith in the American Dream

## The American Dream: A Dream Ruined by Its Own Fulfillment!

The 1950s ended with an America that was still discovering its new identity, only for the 1960s to begin with an America dissatisfied with that identity. As a new generation of young people emerged, it discovered that many of the values and ideals it had been raised on had no place in reality. That generation was then confronted with one event after another, events that stripped away those values, eroded its trust in institutions and in the elite, and, as a result, deprived it of purpose and meaning. Those events shaped a large part of the collective consciousness and the American psyche as we know it today, and they are what we will examine, briefly yet comprehensively, throughout this chapter.

## The Starting Point – The First Crack (the Cold War, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Assassination of John F. Kennedy)

As the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union intensified, many Americans (especially the rising generation of young people) began to see the promise of prosperity and peace as nothing more than a lie or a passing dream that would never come true. The Cuban Missile Crisis became the peak of fear and panic, both inside the United States and around the world, as people feared the outbreak of another world war, one even more devastating than the last.

As American and Soviet influence expanded across the globe, and with the first direct and genuine confrontation between the two superpowers, the world held its breath for thirteen days, fearing the outbreak of a catastrophic nuclear war. When American reconnaissance aircraft discovered that the Soviet Union had deployed nuclear missiles inside Cuba, less than 200 kilometers from the American coastline, both countries entered a dangerous cycle of escalation, only for the political crisis to end with both sides stepping back out of fear of a nuclear catastrophe.

Then came 1963, without giving the American people a chance to catch their breath. President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in November during a presidential motorcade in Dallas, Texas, as if the 1960s were announcing the beginning of a decade filled with earth-shattering events. Kennedy's assassination became a televised loss of innocence, a moment witnessed by the American people live in a way that had never happened before. From that moment on, countless questions spread throughout American public opinion about the details of the assassination: Who was responsible? For what reason? Who benefited? Those questions eventually grew into accusations directed at state institutions themselves, alleging that they had orchestrated the assassination.

## Breaking the Promise of “No More War” (The Vietnam War) – Mid-1960s

The Vietnam War became a wound that bled daily across television screens in every American household, the first televised war ever experienced by the American public. It raised countless questions in American public opinion, as many people saw no clear or convincing justification for it. For most Americans, “Preventing the spread of communism” was not a persuasive enough reason, especially when it required sending hundreds of thousands of American soldiers and young men to fight a war that was not theirs, in defense of values they had never chosen.

At a time when hardly any American family was without a son or relative serving in Vietnam, the American elite found legal ways to spare their own children from compulsory military service. (As was also the case with current U.S. President Donald Trump, incidentally.)

## The Assassination of Reformist Voices and the Collapse of Institutional Hope (1968) & Ruthless Capitalism and the Loss of Meaning

The year 1968 brought an end to the last remaining forms of public hope in institutions. It witnessed the assassinations of two of the most influential voices of reform and civil rights within the American elite; Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy, thereby destroying the last traces of institutional trust in the minds of the younger generation.

That same generation was also confronted with a capitalist model that had reached its peak, one whose influence had tightened its grip over every aspect of life. The defining theme of that period became what may be called “empty abundance”, an abundance that stripped young people of the last remnants of meaning left within them after all those events. It became the starting point for a number of youth movements searching for purpose and meaning, embracing ideals that were lighter for their followers to carry.

## The Rise of the Hippies: From Political Disillusionment to Cultural Escape

The rise of the hippie movement was nothing more than a natural reaction to the succession of events that had deeply rooted the loss of hope and meaning in the hearts of young people. Instead of choosing confrontation, large numbers of young people withdrew from society and began to see themselves as an alternative community as a coping mechanism. The movement primarily advocated values such as peace, love, and a return to nature. Later, however, its philosophy evolved into a number of materialistic

symbols closely associated with it, ironically, consumerist symbols such as fashion and drugs.

## Woodstock, the Moon Landing & the Loss of Trust and Security

The Woodstock Music Festival, held in 1969, marked the height of rock music's dominance and the peak of the hippie movement's dream. It became a symbol of an entire generation of angry young people, bringing together 400,000 attendees whose central message was the rejection of the values of their parents' America, values they believed had failed.

On the other hand, only a few months earlier, in May of the same year, the United States had landed on the Moon, while at the very same time America's youth were experiencing one of the deepest emotional crises in the nation's history.

Soon afterward, violence emerged from within the very movement that had called for "peace," followed by a series of violent incidents that shook the movement from within. It ultimately came to an end with another act of violence—this time carried out by the state itself against its own unarmed young citizens as they peacefully protested the war, in several incidents, most notably the Kent State shootings.

## The Energy Crisis, Economic Shock & Watergate

The year 1973 marked the beginning of the collapse of the dream of economic prosperity that had taken root in the American imagination during the early 1950s. It brought back scenes that Americans had last experienced during the 1930s great depression. Following the outbreak of the October War in the Middle East, and the Arab oil embargo imposed by the Gulf's oil-producing states as a political tool, the American people found themselves facing a severe energy crisis, symbolized by long lines of citizens waiting at empty gas stations.

That same year also marked another wave of collapsing trust in the political elite and even in the American presidency itself, with the emergence of the Watergate scandal and the resignation of President Richard Nixon. Thus ended an era that had begun with a young president murdered by bullets, and ended with another president resigning in disgrace.

Rock music, as we have seen, was undoubtedly the defining voice of that era. Through its melodies, it expressed what was happening inside the minds of millions of young people, not only across the United States, but throughout the Western world. The influence of rock spread far beyond America, reaching the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe during a transitional period marked by a widespread sense of alienation and a desire to rebel.

This is precisely what we hear in rock music itself. Its melodies were distinguished by their sharpness and, at times, their fast-paced rhythm. The electric guitar stood at the center of the sound, accompanied by the drums in the background, both skillfully blended with the voice of a young singer whose intensity often matched that of the guitar itself. The result was a sound that many might describe as noisy, yet within that very noise, an entire generation found peace, a generation that could neither change the world nor truly embrace the “American Dream,” and so projected the noise inside their own minds onto the music of rock.

And whenever American rock of the 1970s is mentioned, The Doors simply cannot be left out. They were neither the only band on the scene nor the most famous throughout the 1960s and 1970s, yet they were among the first to leave a lasting mark and to confront both the media and censorship institutions. In doing so, The Doors opened many doors, above all the door to challenging established norms for an entire generation of restless rebels.

Yet I would be doing rock music an injustice as a revolutionary art form of that era if I overlooked bands such as Pink Floyd, The Beatles, and Led Zeppelin, who, arguably, had the greatest global influence despite not being American. Their music blended the spirit of rock with philosophical rebellion, nihilism, and European mythology and fantasy, giving their lyrics a timeless quality. Their influence and the relevance of what they expressed have endured to this day, continuing to reflect the same sense of alienation and dissatisfaction that prevailed among American youth during that period.

NOTE: This article was drafted and written in Arabic, Then translated word by word into English with the "Assistance" of AI, being proofread closely, all with the mere purpose of saving time and effort, and setting the article's case in the clearest way possible to a way more wide scale of readers.

Further Reading

- Crash Course U.S. History (series)
- JFK Library
- U.S. National Archives
- The Vietnam War (documentary)
- Woodstock (1970 documentary)