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**Whatever: a history of teen movies**

Killian Fox The Observer, Sunday 22 March 2009

The teen movie came of age in 50s America, not long after the concept of the teenager was born. The idea of an intermediate stage between childhood and adulthood, with its own peculiar characteristics, was still new when Marlon Brando donned his biker jacket in **The Wild One** (1953) and answered "What are you rebelling against?" with "What've you got?"

Changing social attitudes and a booming postwar economy fed into the emergence of teenagers. Middle-class parents who had weathered the Depression and the war wanted their children to have full educations, uninterrupted by work or military service. As a result, young people found themselves with larger allowances and more free time. The dramatic possibilities of this stage of life, marked by rebellion, angst and young love, quickly became evident to movie-makers.

Rock'n'roll, the sound that defined 50s adolescence, figured strongly in the early teen movies. **Rock Around the Clock** (1956) was one of the first films to be marketed at teenagers to the exclusion of their elders. Its success induced Hollywood to exploit this new demographic.

The Gidget movies and **Beach Party** (1963) developed a sure-fire formula in tune with the mood of the 60s, uniting music, comedy and romance with surf, Californian sun and skimpy bikinis. Much of the success of the teen movie lies in the fact that it crosses over so fluidly with other genres, and in the 70s, teens were subjected to horror (**Carrie**, 1976), romance (**Love Story**, 1970), comedy (**National Lampoon's Animal House**, 1978) and John Travolta musicals - **Saturday Night Fever** (1977) and **Grease** (1978).

High-school comedies featuring the so-called Brat Pack were huge in the 80s - a prime example being **The Breakfast Club** (1985). None of these films would be complete without the high-school holy trinity: the bitchy cheerleader, the uber-jock footballer and the bespectacled nerd.

Self-referentiality entered the classroom in the Nineties: the students in **Scream** (1996) knew the rules of teen slasher flicks but got slashed nonetheless. Classic texts were rejuvenated in **Clueless** (1996), an update of Jane Austen's Emma, Romeo + Juliet (1996), and **10 Things I Hate About You** (1999), based on **The Taming of the Shrew**.

Today, the teen movie remains in good health - witness the success of the **High School Musical** series and **Superbad** (2007).