Examine the social and political context for the rise of the ‘Teddy Boy’.

There is no doubt that Teddy Boys were a distinctive and flamboyant male youth subculture of the mid-1950s in Britain. Their emergence was due in part to both social and political influences at the time together with a strong desire of young men to express their individuality. Teddy Boys initially arose as part of the post war era. Children grew up, in many cases, without a distinctive male role model in their lives and families were no longer as close as they once were. In many cases there were clear gaps between parents and children. However, does history really judge this generation fairly, in light of media criticism or is their account true and justified? In order to truly understand, it becomes necessary to look at the way the movement changed over the course of the 1950s.

English youth craved stimulus. Add to this, strong personalities and a need to differentiate oneself, male youth rejected traditional Edwardian style and replaced it with something more flamboyant. Something that would make them stand out from the crowd. The first Teddy Boys club was formed.

Since there large gaps between parents and children, there were no doubt difficulties in communication. This was highlighted in a film produced by, Karel Reisz, who worked on 1950s and 1960s British cinema, called “We Are the Lambeth Boys” (1958). It was a documentary about the daily activities of the Lambeth Boys, one group of Teddy Boys. Their style soon became well known, as people could now see what this group was wearing. Soon others were attracted by their dress, shirts, drape jackets, crepe-soled shoes, bootlace ties, and side parting greased hair style. Their personalities were generous and they were quick to express their own opinions and personal points of view. Together they expressed a unique kind of breath. On the one hand they sing in a sensitive manner and on the other, act like a giddy goat when walking on the streets. One of the most distinctive acts that is reflected in historical media was their noisy demeaner, shouting, and whistling at ladies as pass by. They really created a colourful atmosphere. This kind of straightforward character, could easily connect with delinquent youth.

Looking at history, we can see four areas where changes in the Teddy Boy were drastic - in dance, film, clothes, and music. This is further reflected in a Mass-Observation report in << Juke box Britain : Americanisation and youth culture, 1945-60 >> from 1949. This report recorded one hundred and fifty people dancing at London dance hall, four-fifths of who were teenagers, aged between seventeen and nineteen years. At this dance, dressed in US airforce uniforms, there were also six black males dancing the "jive" "the jitterbug" and "doing an ordinary quickstep". Some British males emulated the way they danced and went on to dress in a similar dress style, like the drape suit. This dress style made the wearer appear elaborate and dandified. Soon the Americanisation of the Teddyboys expanded.

From 1956 they became more rebellious. Some teds began to riot. This was again heightened with the American film, Blackboard Jungle (1955), which became a watershed for teds. The students at that time were horrible, even rebelling against their teachers. They started imitated American students in the film. However there was one constant - the recognisable “drape suit”.

Hollywood, however also started to have more influence, as major films started to show actors in a new "Zoot suit" Recorded in <<Juke box Britain : Americanisation and youth culture, 1945-60 >>. The Zoot suit was created by Cecil Gee around 1946. Explained by Wikipedia, it is a suit with high-waisted, wide-legged, tight-cuffed, pegged trousers, and a long coat with wide lapels and wide padded shoulders. At that time, Cary Grant and Clarke Gable, who were famous actors in Hollywood, embraced zoot style. Its popularity in America grew, when in 1953, a Mexican American youth with a new kind of “Zoot suit” and greased hair, created a divergent subculture of the Teddy Boys which became known as Teddy Boy folk devils. It was a real perversion of the once respectable image. This new breed were out of control and causing a spike in Juvenile delinquency. Soon they were introduced to Britain, and it became the new standard of clothing for youth culture.

John Osborne, a father with a teenaged son caught up in the Teddy Boy fad, could not understand what was happening. He said, “that his son's personality had changed and that he had never been in trouble before he bought an Edwardian suit”. As a father, he was deeply disappointed and felt a widening ravine between he and his son.

Along with clothing, popular music was also one of the important American influences on British youth culture. “The first important sounds of rock ‘n’ roll into Britain were immediately popular with many of those young people who had been able to hear it despite being largely ignored by BBC radio, the juke box saw its
introduction (Adrian horn). British teenager’s became interested in American popular music.

Herbert Richard Hoggart who is a British academic, studied the era and observed that the Teddy Boys stood by a jukebox in Northern milk bars. They listened to American Rock away from parents in milk bars and coffee bars. Other popular pop music at the time included - e.g. Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly, Chuck Berry and others. It totally gave rise on music of Britain. The combination of all these influences had a huge effect on British youth culture.

The media was not kind. Story after story of exaggerated press coverage, and soon the public had a very different perspective of the youth subculture. Teds became more noticeable. People were fed a stream of negative press coverage. With the introduction of the ‘folk devils’, society started to perceive Teddy boys as a threat to their way of life. In late 1950s, their name terrorized immigrants in Notting Hill and Nottingham, which was flamed by the mainstream media. They dubbed their events as ‘race riots’.

In one newspaper “Spokane Daily Chronicle - 21 May 1955”, the headlines started to become notorious. One of the most controversial headlines was “Teddy Boys Hunted by Scotland Yard”. With the huge scare campaigns and political nervousness action started to get taken to quell the unrest. An incident that is now famous historically was when a police officer caught four Teddy Boys who trying to embrace a girl.

It was not easy for readers to ignor this kind of media attention. Newspapers across Britain started to follow suit as headlines got more and more creative. In the “The Milwaukee Sentinel - 28 Dec 1958”, there was coverage of a big chapter of the Teddy Boys. The editor not only sited the report in the central part of the paper, but also wrote an extensive report to cover the event, which took up 18% o the newspaper page. The title read, “Teddy Boys Get Jolt In England”.

The first paragraph, talks about how the police tried to take action and reduce the number of Teddy Boys, however, there was only limited success, as the paper goes on to say that only 70% of these delinquents are able to return to a normal life. In other words, it says that there was no hope of 30% of Teddy Boys.

Unfortunately, people are very influenced by the media, as they are today. The Teddy Boys became the social outcasts of the 1950s.

Conclusion
It is unclear whether the media shapes society or whether society shapes the media. Looking at the rise of the Teddy Boy during the 1950s, a class of youth who wore Edwardian style fashion, it is clear that it was in fact the media that had a marked influence in the development of the Teddy Boy image. Initially this group was perceived as lovely and innocent, however, with Hollywood, Americanisation, and media publicity this group of young men soon morphed into something unrecognisable. As a result there were extreme changes. This historical example of the Teddy Boys shows how a combination of environment and circumstances can play a part in the changing nature of people.

Works Cited
1. Folk devils and moral panics
2. Juke box Britain : Americanisation and youth culture, 1945-60 (Adrian horn)
3. Youth, popular culture and moral panics
4. The subcultures reader
5. Youth culture in modern Britain, c.1920-1970. (David Fowler.)
6. Youth in society : contemporary theory, policy and practice
7. Youth in a changing society
8. Comparative youth culture : the sociology of youth cultures and youth subcul
9. We Are the Lambeth Boys (1958) (Karel Reisz)
10. Blackboard Jungle(1955) (Pandro S. Berman)