

Rock's Retired

Rock and roll could be thought of as a once-booming city that was full of life, where vibrant neon signs lined the streets. The town was crowded and full of opportunities, with a new song or band waiting to be heard around every corner. Loud gatherings of people could be seen in every open space watching their idols play their newest album. Now, however, the city is run down, and all the people have abandoned their once-beloved town. There are no more new bands or songs, no large gatherings of people listening to their favorite artists playing their latest music. The once-booming genre has been overshadowed by new trends and new cultures. The electric guitars, drums, and bass have been replaced by harsh hypnotic beats. Rap and pop have pushed rock and roll out and have replaced it on the Billboard charts. Since 2002, there hasn't been any rock song to hit No. 1 on Billboard's Hot 100 chart (Zellner).

The saying "Rock and roll never dies" was popularized by the singer Neil Young in his 1979 song "My, My, Hey, Hey." I say it has, or at least it will never return to its dominance over popular culture. When I say rock, I am talking about the classic rock sound from the 1960s to the 1990s. Since then, rock has separated into many different sub-genres, such as alt rock, indie rock, and pop rock. While these genres have the elements of classic rock, they have been influenced by other genres like pop or hip-hop. Rock and roll will never return to its former glory due to major cultural shifts. These shifts include new cultural values, a change in what music teenagers are listening to, and an aging group of fans.

Firstly, one culture shift that has led to the demise of rock is the change in cultural values. Older rock songs can reflect outdated values that have since changed and are no longer accepted. One example of this is "Christine Sixteen" by KISS. A lyric that stands out in this song is, "I

don't usually say things like this to girls your age, but when I saw you coming out of school that day" ("Christine Sixteen"). This lyric stands out for an obvious reason: it describes a grown man watching a sixteen-year-old girl come out of school and falling in love with her. It reflects an outdated view that it's acceptable for an older man to want to be with a minor. This concept was very common in rock lyrics. Now it has been realized how immoral this is. Another example of rock lyrics demonstrating outdated morals is in The Rolling Stones song "Under My Thumb." One lyric that stands out to me is "It's down to me, yes it is. The way she does just what she's told. Down to me, the change has come. She's under my thumb" ("Under My Thumb"). The man in this relationship is in control of everything the woman does and says. The song is about a woman going from being independent to being controlled by the man, and the man is celebrating his taming of the woman. This lyric demonstrates the outdated value of how a woman was supposed to be submissive to her husband and do everything he says. A third example of this is in the song "Girls, Girls, Girls", by Mötley Crüe. The song is about exotic dancers from all around the world. A lyric that stands out is "Girls, Girls, Girls. Long legs and burgundy lips. Girls, Girls, Girls. Dancing down on Sunset Strip, Girls, Girls, Girls. Red lips, fingertips" ("Girls, Girls, Girls"). This lyric is reducing women down to their body parts, and degrading them to sexual objects. This reflects the outdated value of how women are nothing but objects whose only purpose is to do whatever men want. I think this is one of the most important reasons as to why rock is dead. With society realizing how their values need to be changed, the outdated lyrics can be hard to listen to, which is a reason teenagers have changed to new genres that are less insensitive and healthier.

Secondly, a major culture shift is that teenagers aren't listening to rock as much as they used to, which makes it less culturally significant. Teenagers have been and will continue to be

the main consumers of music. In the beginning of rock and roll, listening to rock was seen as a sign of rebellion. Teenagers used rock to differ from their jazz-loving parents; the essence of rock music embodied the teens' need for the ability to differentiate themselves from previous generations. Rock was a unique creative outlet for teens to express the complexity of youth and its distinct experiences. The generations that listened to rock as teenagers have now become parents of their own, and since they listened to rock, their kids cannot listen to rock to rebel from their parents. This has led to a change in what teens want to listen to. Genres like rap and pop have replaced rock as the genre the youth loves most. In a survey done by Audiencenet, it showed that only 28% of teenagers ages 16-19 listened to rock the most, while other genres like pop had 52% of teenagers cultivated ("Favorite"). One reason for this is that rock isn't seen as a sign of rebellion anymore. Rock has been accepted into the mainstream way more than it was when it was just starting, and genres like rap and EDM (Electronic Dance Music) have since replaced rock as examples of rebellious music. The change in teenagers' genre of choice can be compared to how trends leave and return. Teenagers' music taste has always been changing over time, just like the new fashion trends change over time. They both go in and out of the mainstream.

Lastly, the third reason I think rock and roll is dead is that rock has an aging fanbase. Rock was most prominent from the 1950s through the 1980s, and that was over 70 years ago. The teens that were once fans of rock are now at least 60 years old, and with the switch from records to streaming services, this makes it harder for older generations to listen to their favorite bands. While there is a shrinking group of older rock fans, there is also a shortage of teenage rock fans. Since there aren't that many teens listening to rock music, the overall fanbase of the genre has dwindled.

Some people might argue that rock and roll will never die and could say that rock and roll has instead evolved. While I think this is partly true, in my opinion, rock has instead been diluted. There are some modern rock bands that have used some elements of classic rock, such as Arctic Monkeys or Maneskin, but these bands don't have the same essence that classic rock has. While I myself enjoy listening to both of these bands, nothing will compare to the experience of listening to classic rock bands like Mötley Crüe or Jon Bon Jovi. I think the main reason for this is that rock has lost its core identity. Rock has been compromised to fit more marketable genres such as pop rock or alt rock.

Rock and roll as we have known it for over 70 years has died; this is due to many factors, such as a change in teenagers' preference for other genres over rock, rock lyrics reflecting outdated values, and an aging group of once diehard fans. While rock itself has declined in popularity, I think that the lasting impacts on American culture will continue to be visible. Some of these effects are present in social norms, fashion, and the way people rebel. Rock and roll has been a reliable and remarkable source of entertainment with its rhythmic and radiant riffs.

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