



CULTURE (<https://juicypinkbox.com/tag/culture/>)

The Definitive Guide to Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'n' Roll

The wild tales and legendary icons that rocked the world.

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Photo: Dustin Tray via Pexels (<https://www.pexels.com/photo/rock-artist-live-performance-11963114/>)

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We've all heard the phrase "sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll." Or at least, some riff on it.

Maybe you've read the 2003 essay collection *Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs* by Chuck Klosterman, or *Sex, Drugs & Opera*, the 2014 debut novel by Tears for Fears co-founder and guitarist Roland Orzabal?

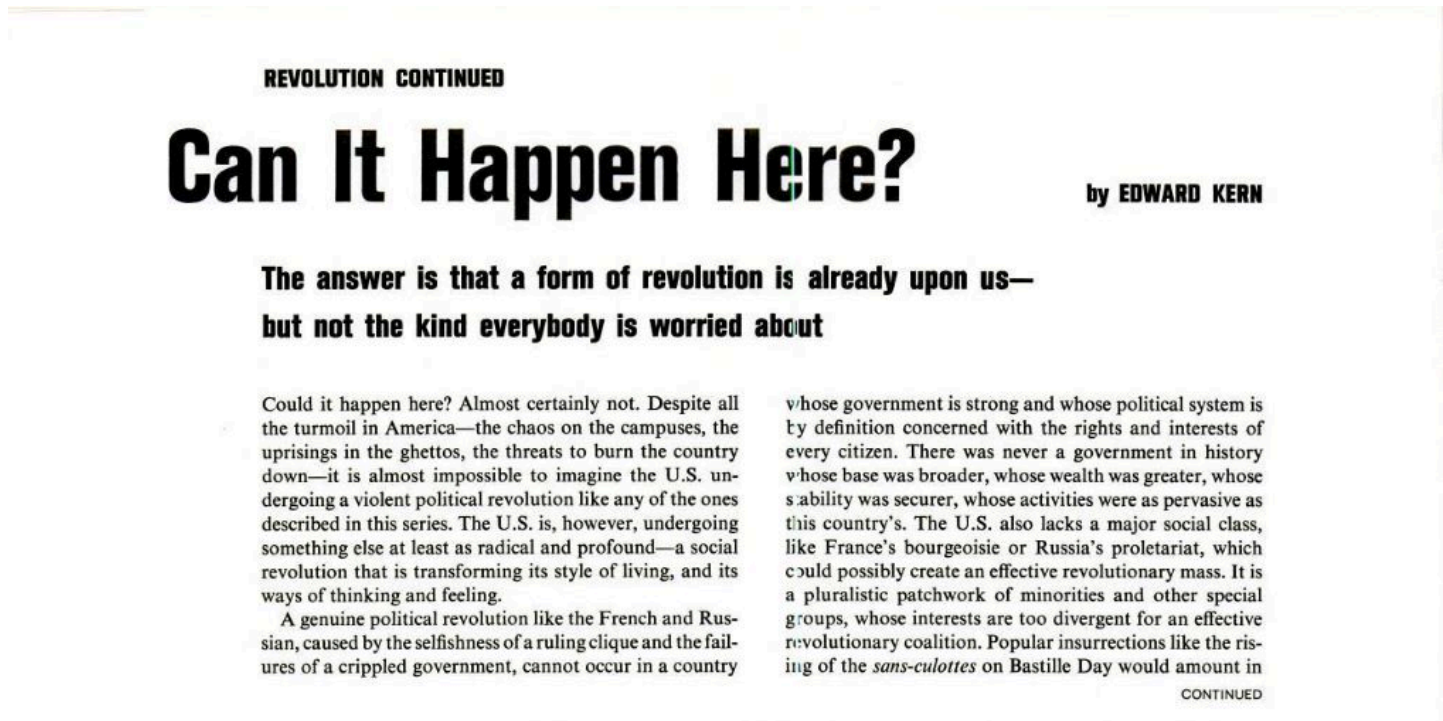
Perhaps you just know it through cultural osmosis.

But really, where does it come from? What does it actually mean?

The Origins of the Phrase

In this regard, we can point to a multi-part article series about modern revolutions in the October 17, 1969 issue of *LIFE Magazine*.

In an entry titled "Can It Happen Here?" (https://books.google.ca/books?id=JFAEAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA80-IA3&lpg=PA80-IA3&dq=%22The+counter+culture+has+its+sacraments+in+sex,+drugs+and+rock.%22&source=bl&ots=jjjTuQ0TWd&sig=XZsD785Lzxndxno5-2fRWhQwJhc&hl=en&sa=X&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=revolution&f=false) journalist Edward Kern writes about youth countercultural movements and activism.



(https://books.google.ca/books?id=JFAEAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=de&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q=can%20it%20happen%20here%3F&f=false)

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He states, "The counterculture has its sacraments in sex, drugs, and rock, its literature in hundreds of underground newspapers, its art in Day-Glo posters and in movie film, its shifting pantheon of culture heroes in Zen gurus and rock groups, and, of course, its identifying costume, hair style, speech, and signals of recognition." 

Prevalence Across the Pond

Reportedly, the British magazine *The Spectator* published "Not for nothing is the youth culture characterized by sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll" in a 1971 issue. Then in 1977, the rock musician Ian Drury released his aptly named single "Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll."



Ian Dury And The Blockheads – Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll via Youtube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=erGNSQMj79Q>)

While the actual phrase may have first been coined in 1969, its ethos of hedonist, antiestablishment rebellion can be found pretty much throughout the course of human history. But to keep it simple, let's just wind it back 70 years.

1950s: Beats and the Beginnings of Rock

The literary scene known as the Beat Movement or the Beat Generation should really be the first thing that comes to mind when you think about “sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll.”

Helmed by writers such as Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Diane di Prima, and Alene Lee, the Beats are remembered for rejecting the conformity and social rigidity of post-WWII United States. They offer a raw and uninhibited exploration of the human condition through their poetry and prose.

The Beat Generation



The Beat Generation | Decades TV Network via Youtube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XYitYHntLI4>)

Pushing against the social norms of the time, Beat writers embraced sexual liberation.

Two of the best known Beat writers, Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs, were even openly gay—which was brave, considering the attitudes of the time and the fact that in 1952, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) classified homosexuality as a mental disorder in the first edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*.

A Generation Known for Experimentation

The Beat Generation is also known for experimenting with drugs, most notably cannabis, amphetamines (like benzedrine), and psychedelics.

Of course, Beat writers weren't the only creatives who were known to use recreational drugs in the '50s. Musicians did, too.

In fact, we can go all the way back to the 1920s as jazz and cannabis have been tightly linked. And some historians say that the Beats' cannabis use was inspired by jazz musicians.

In the 1950s, rock 'n' roll evolved from rhythm and blues music. An offshoot of jazz, it was developed by Black musicians, most notably Chuck Berry (known as the Father of Rock and Roll) and Little Richard (coined the Architect of Rock and Roll), who were, in turn, influenced by Sister Rosetta Tharpe (the Godmother of Rock and Roll).

By the mid-50s, white musicians had begun to appropriate the style. Singers such as Elvis Presley and Johnny Cash contributed to rock 'n' roll's spread across the nation. Like its predecessor jazz, drug use (particularly cannabis and amphetamines) is linked to the early advent of the art form. And, again like jazz, it sparked a moral panic among certain populations of white Americans. This group objected to the sexual themes that were present in the music and were vehemently against "race mixing."

Chuck Berry - Johnny B. Goode (Live 1958)



Chuck Berry – Johnny B. Goode (1958) | gaslightrecords via Youtube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ROwVrF0Ceg>)



Sister Rosetta Tharpe – This little light of mine (1960) | Rock N Roll via Youtube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIxNjSK9Bx0>)

Johnny Cash - I Walk The Line 1958



Johnny Cash – I Walk The Line (1958) | Jamie Flores via Youtube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xObSJWlWui0&list=PL0yo8BPhSm-x4ZJzusA8mBwkSuzp7-tB7&index=2>)

elvis presley-hound dog



Elvis Presley – Hound Dog (1956) | jorgeollie via Youtube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lzQ8GDBA8Is&list=PLJ3aD1ATG56IT2PoGePrXK0vkvo9hJRK8&index=2>)

1960s-1970s: Turn On, Tune In, Drop Out

The confluence of sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll during the 60s and 70s is perhaps the most well known.

With the introduction of the Pill, which became available in the summer of 1960, women were empowered to seize more agency and control over their bodies and sex lives.

This led to the sexual revolution. This normalized and advanced the acceptance of sex outside of marriage, non-monogamy, and non-heterosexual relationships.

In 1965, William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson (better known as the Masters and Johnson research team) concluded the first phase of their groundbreaking studies on the science of sex, publishing their findings in the book *Human Sexual Response* in 1966, and then *Human Sexual Inadequacy* in 1970.

Masters and Johnson's female sexual response cycle via ResearchGate (https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Masters-and-Johnsons-female-sexual-response-cycle-that-can-be-correlated-to-the-sexual_fig3_320036543)

Then, in 1973, two major developments in the field of sex happened. *Roe v Wade* went in front of the Supreme Court. Then, the classification of homosexuality as a mental disorder in the *DSM* was repealed by the APA.



An Era of Sexual Liberation and Enlightenment

Those who were in the counterculture of the '60s and '70s, particularly hippies, not only reveled in the new wave of sexual liberation (<https://juicypinkbox.com/welcome-to-the-sexual-revolution/>), but also contributed to it. They promoted the concept and practice of free love. Of course, hippies are also inextricably entangled with the wider spread of cannabis and psychedelics. Many touted their potential for spiritual enlightenment.

At the same time, spiritual enlightenment wasn't the only draw of psychedelics.

Starting in 1960, psychologist Timothy Leary was one of the first to study the therapeutic potential of psilocybin and LSD. This initial curiosity evolved into publicly promoting psychedelics as well as coining the phrase “turn on, tune in, drop out.” Leary is known as one of the most influential figures of the “Psychedelic Era.”

The Influence on Publishing

Further combining sex and drugs, Hugh Hefner—a longtime proponent of cannabis use and its legalization (<https://hightimes.com/news/hugh-hefner-playboy-founder-and-cannabis-advocate-found-dead-at-91/>)—provided the first funding to NORML, a cannabis advocacy organization (<https://norml.org/blog/2020/05/22/a-founder-looks-at-50-hefner-and-playboy/>), via the Playboy Foundation in 1971. Three years later in 1974, the publishing industry, never immune to the allure of sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll, gained a new, groundbreaking magazine with the first issue of *High Times*.



Hugh Hefner with “Dr. Hip” Eugene Schoenfeld and Keith Stroup during a NORML (<https://norml.org/blog/2020/05/22/a-founder-looks-at-50-hefner-and-playboy/>) fundraiser at the Playboy Mansion in LA

The Bands Who Defined Sex, Drugs, and Rock ‘n’ Roll

During these decades, music was heavily and overtly influenced by drug use. Bands like The Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, The Beatles, The Doors, and Pink Floyd incorporated trippy visuals in their album art and band aesthetics. They also used distortion effects in their music. They wrote lyrics about being high—or could easily be interpreted that way. Songs like “Purple Haze” by Jimi Hendrix, “White Rabbit” by Jefferson Airplane, and “Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds” by The Beatles all come to mind.



The Jimi Hendrix Experience - Purple Haze (Live at the Atlanta Pop Festival)



The Jimi Hendrix Experience – Purple Haze via Youtube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJunCsrhJgg>)
(<https://www.youtube.com/@JimiHendrixVEVO>)

Jefferson Airplane -White Rabbit-

Jefferson Airplane – White Rabbit | dustasdu via Youtube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WANNqr-vcx0>)

The Beatles - Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds (Official Video)

The Beatles – Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds | TheBeatlesLyrics via Youtube (<https://www.youtube.com/@TheBeatlesLyricsOfficial1>)

Grateful Dead - Ripple (New York, NY 10/31/80) (Official Live Video)

Grateful Dead – Ripple | Grateful Dead via Youtube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5yJmBC7cMTM>)



Today: Do We Still Have Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'n' Roll?

One may wonder: does this ethos even still exist?

Cannabis legalization and decriminalization has been steadily rolling through the United States for over a decade. This ultimately has eliminated much of the rebellious spirit that came with lighting up a joint. Even psychedelics are becoming more mainstream, with psilocybin slowly obtaining legal status in the country and ketamine therapy heavily normalized.

At the same time, sex will never *not* be a popular activity. Especially because of improved sex education, understanding of consent and boundaries, and acceptance of a wide range of sexuality and gender expression.

However, the 2022 repeal of *Roe v Wade* and the subsequent and frequent attacks on reproductive rights, including things as commonplace as birth control, may be a mood killer for straight people who don't want to risk pregnancy or forced parenthood.

As for rock 'n' roll... it's still going strong and likely will never die. This is especially true since bands are able to attract audiences and share their music easily through social media and platforms like Bandcamp.

Realize, though, that sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll isn't about the individual components. It's about the central spirit of pushing back against authoritarian control, celebrating artistic freedom, and embracing life's hedonistic pleasures.

The ultimate spirit of the phrase is not a product of the 20th century. Indeed, it has existed for eons. It's not going to fade away any time soon.

Sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll is here to stay.



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