



THE 1950s:

"Conservatism, Complacency, and Contentment"

OR

"Anxiety, Alienation, and Social Unrest" ??



1A. Baby Boom

It seems to me that every other young housewife I see is pregnant.

-- British visitor to America, 1958



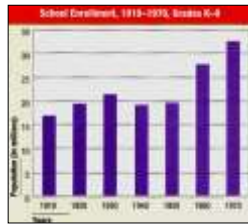
1957 → 1 baby born every 7 seconds



1B. Baby Boom



Dr. Benjamin Spock and the Anderson Quintuplets



2A. Suburban Living

Levittown, L. I.: "The American Dream"

1949 → William Levitt produced 150 houses per week.



\$7,990 or \$60/month with no down payment.

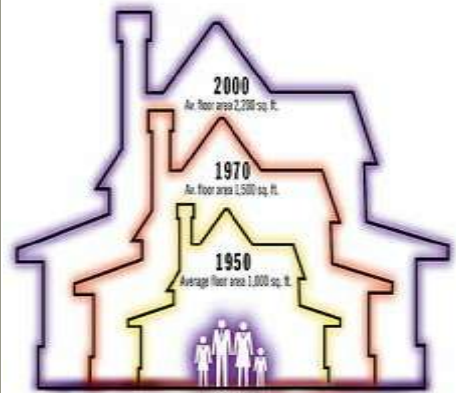


2A. Suburban Living: The New "American Dream"

- k 1 story high
- k 12'x19' living room
- k 2 bedrooms
- k tiled bathroom
- k garage
- k small backyard
- k front lawn



By 1960 → 1/3 of the U. S. population in the suburbs.



2a. Suburban Living

SHIFTS IN POPULATION DISTRIBUTION, 1940-1970

	1940	1950	1960	1970
Central Cities	31.6%	32.3%	32.6%	32.0%
Suburbs	19.5%	23.8%	30.7%	41.6%
Rural Areas/ Small Towns	48.9%	43.9%	36.7%	26.4%

U. S. Bureau of the Census.

2c. Suburban Living: The Typical TV Suburban Families



The Donna Reed Show
1958-1966



Leave It to Beaver
1957-1963



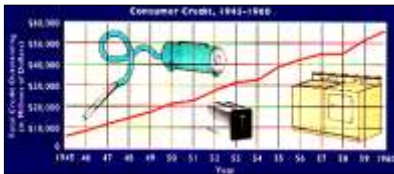
Father Knows Best
1954-1958



The Ozzie & Harriet Show
1952-1966

3a. Consumerism

1950 → Introduction of the Diner's Card



All babies were potential consumers who spearheaded a brand-new market for food, clothing, and shelter.
-- Life Magazine (May, 1958)

3b. Consumerism



4a. A Changing Workplace

Automation:

1947-1957 → factory workers decreased by 4.3%, eliminating 1.5 million blue-collar jobs.

By 1956 → more white-collar than blue-collar jobs in the U. S.

Computers → **Mark I** (1944). First IBM mainframe computer (1951).

Corporate Consolidation:

By 1960 → 600 corporations (1/2% of all U. S. companies) accounted for 53% of total corporate income.

WHY?? Cold War military buildup.

4b. A Changing Workplace

New Corporate Culture:

"The Company Man"

1956 → **Sloan Wilson's** *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*



5A. The Culture of the Car

Car registrations: 1945 → 25,000,000
1960 → 60,000,000

2-family cars doubles from 1951-1958



1958 Pink Cadillac



1959 Chevy Corvette

1956 → **Interstate Highway Act** → largest public works project in American history!

↳ Cost \$32 billion.

↳ 41,000 miles of new highways built.

5B. The Culture of the Car

America became a more homogeneous nation because of the automobile.



First McDonald's (1955)



Howard Johnson's



Drive-In Movies

5C. The Culture of the Car

The U. S. population was on the move in the 1950s.

NE & Mid-W → S & SW ("**Sunbelt**" states)

1955 → Disneyland opened in Southern California. (40% of the guests came from outside California, most by car.)



Frontier Land



Main Street



Tomorrow Land

6A. Television

1946 → 7,000 TV sets in the U. S.

1950 → 50,000,000 TV sets in the U. S.

Television is a vast wasteland. → Newton Minnow, Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, 1961

Mass Audience → TV celebrated traditional American values.



Truth, Justice, and the American way!

6B. Television - The Western



Davy Crockett
King of the Wild Frontier



Sheriff Matt Dillon,
Gunsmoke

The Lone Ranger (and his faithful sidekick, Tonto):

Who is that masked man??

6C. Television - Family Shows

Glossy view of mostly middle-class suburban life.



I Love Lucy



The Honeymooners

But...

Social Winners?... AND... Losers??

7A. Teen Culture

In the 1950s → the word "teenager" entered the American language.
 By 1956 → 13 mil. teens with \$7 bil. to spend a year.
 1951 → "race music" → "ROCK 'N ROLL"



Elvis Presley → "The King"

7B. Teen Culture

"Juvenile Delinquency" ???

1951 → J. D. Salinger's
A Catcher in the Rye



Marlon Brando in
The Wild One
 (1953)



James Dean in
Rebel Without a Cause
 (1955)

7C. Teen Culture

The "Beat" Generation:

- 📖 Jack Kerouac → *On The Road*
- 📖 Allen Ginsberg → poem, "Howl"
- 📖 Neal Cassady
- 📖 William S. Burroughs



"Beatnik"

"Clean" Teen

7D. Teen Culture

Behavioral Rules of the 1950s:

- 👉 Obey Authority.
- 👉 Control Your Emotions.
- 👉 Don't Make Waves → Fit in with the Group.
- 👉 Don't Even Think About Sex!!!

8A. Religious Revival

Today in the U. S., the Christian faith is back in the center of things. -- Time magazine, 1954

Church membership: 1940 → 64,000,000
 1960 → 114,000,000

Television Preachers:

1. Catholic Bishop **Fulton J. Sheen** → "Life is Worth Living"
2. Methodist Minister **Norman Vincent Peale** → *The Power of Positive Thinking*
3. Reverend **Billy Graham** → ecumenical message; warned against the evils of Communism.

8B. Religious Revival

Hollywood: apex of the biblical epics.



The Robe
 1953



The Ten Commandments
 1956



Ben Hur
 1959

It's un-American to be un-religious!
 -- The Christian Century, 1954

9a. Well-Defined Gender Roles

The *ideal modern woman* married, cooked and cared for her family, and kept herself busy by joining the local PTA and leading a troop of Campfire Girls. She entertained guests in her family's suburban house and worked out on the trampoline to keep her size 12 figure.

-- Life magazine, 1956



Marilyn Monroe

The *ideal 1950s man* was the provider, protector, and the boss of the house. -- Life magazine, 1955



1956 → William H. Whyte, Jr. → *The Organization Man*

■ a middle-class, white suburban male is the ideal.

9a. Well-Defined Gender Roles

Changing Sexual Behavior:

Alfred Kinsey:

1948 → *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*

1953 → *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*

- ✓ Premarital sex was common.
- ✓ Extramarital affairs were frequent among married couples.

Kinsey's results are an assault on the family as a basic unit of society, a negation of moral law, and a celebration of licentiousness.

-- Life magazine, early 1950s

10a. Progress Through Science

1951 -- First IBM Mainframe Computer

1952 -- Hydrogen Bomb Test

1953 -- DNA Structure Discovered

1954 -- Salk Vaccine Tested for Polio

1957 -- First Commercial U. S. Nuclear Power Plant

1958 -- NASA Created

1959 -- Press Conference of the First 7 American Astronauts

10a. Progress Through Science

1957 → Russians launch **SPUTNIK I**



1958 → National Defense Education Act

10c. Progress Through Science

UFO Sightings skyrocketed in the 1950s.



War of the Worlds

Hollywood used aliens as a metaphor for whom ??

10d. Progress Through Science

Atomic Anxieties:

- ⊕ "Duck-and-Cover Generation"



Atomic Testing:

- ⊕ 1946-1962 → U. S. exploded 217 nuclear weapons over the Pacific and in Nevada.



The 50s Come to a Close

1959 → Nixon-Khrushchev
"Kitchen Debate"



Cold War ----->

Tensions



<----- Technology
& Affluence

Class Discussion Topic:

The postwar era witnessed tremendous economic growth and rising social contentment and conformity. Yet in the midst of such increasing affluence and comfortable domesticity, social critics expressed a growing sense of unease with American culture in the 1950s.

Assess the validity of the above statement and explain how the decade of the 1950s laid the groundwork for the social and political turbulence of the 1960s.

