THE 1950s:

"Conservatism, Complacency, and Contentment"

OR

"Anxiety, Alienation, and Social Unrest"
Election of 1948

- Harry Truman, incumbent Democrat against Thomas E. Dewey, Republican from New York
- Democratic party split by Truman’s stance on civil rights.
- Dixiecrats - States Rights Party
- Strom Thurmond, Governor from South Carolina becomes candidate for president
Election of 1948

- Truman defeats Dewey in stunning upset.
- **Fair Deal**
  - Legislative action - extend New Deal programs
  - National Healthcare and Steady Income for Farmers defeated by Dixiecrats and Republicans.
  - Minimum wage from 40 cents to 75 cents
  - Flood control programs and irrigation programs.
Election of 1952

- Truman’s popularity fell in his second term
- Republican’s portrayed the Democrats as weak on national defense –
  - Not strong enough to confront communism
- Republican nominee, Former World War II general, Dwight D. Eisenhower
- Approach to government, “Dynamic Conservatism”.
- Running mate, Richard M. Nixon
22nd Amendment

• Early in Eisenhower presidency, this amendment was ratified – approved by states.

• Term Limits for President
  – Two consecutive terms for any person in the office of President of the United States.
    – If serve more than two years of another person’s term, may run for reelection only once after that.

• After Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected four times, some felt this restriction was necessary.
Eisenhower Prosperity

- Post-war economic boom
- New technology and business opportunities flourished.
- Highest standard of living in the world.
- White collar jobs – “Organization man”
- Franchising as business model.
- Multinational conglomerates – a company owning smaller companies in unrelated industries.
- Eisenhower Warning (Problem) – Development of the Military Industrial Complex
“Baby Boom”

- Soldiers returning from the war settled down and had families.
- Advances in medicine
- Confidence in the economy
- Desire for large families - more children born.
- 1945 to 1964, dramatic increase in the birthrate of children.
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
Baby Boom

Dr. Benjamin Spock and the Anderson Quintuplets
Housing Crisis

- Severe housing shortage for returning veterans from World War II
- Assembly line methods of mass production applied to building houses.
- Small town feel to these new developments.
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.
Suburban Living: The New “American Dream”

- 1 story high
- 12’ x 19’ living room
- 2 bedrooms
- tiled bathroom
- garage
- small backyard
- front lawn

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

SHIFTS IN POPULATION DISTRIBUTION, 1940-1970

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Central Cities</th>
<th>Suburbs</th>
<th>Rural Areas/Small Towns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

U. S. Bureau of the Census.
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
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)
Consumerism
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.


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.
New Corporate Culture: “The Company Man”

1956 → Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*
Redefining Women’s Role

• During the war, women worked in industry - proving they had the necessary skills and ability.

• Men, returning from the war, wanted to return to status quo.

• Tensions in the family - many broken marriages - changing perception of women.
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

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.
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
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.
- Unifies nation, expands trucking, - motels, vacation spots, gas stations.
The Culture of the Car

America became a more homogeneous nation because of the automobile.

First McDonald’s (1955)

Drive-In Movies

Howard Johnson’s
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.)
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!
Television - The Western

Davy Crockett
King of the Wild Frontier

The Lone Ranger
(and his faithful sidekick, Tonto):
Who is that masked man??

Sheriff Matt Dillon, Gunsmoke
Television - Family Shows

Glossy view of mostly middle-class suburban life.

I Love Lucy

But...

The Honeymooners

Social Winners?... AND... Loosers?
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”
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)
Teen Culture

The “Beat” Generation:

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

“Beatnik”

“Clean” Teen
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!!!
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
Progress Through Science

1957 → Russians launch SPUTNIK I

1958 → National Defense Education Act
Progress Through Science

UFO Sightings skyrocketed in the 1950s.

Hollywood used aliens as a metaphor for whom??

War of the Worlds
Progress Through Science

Atomic Anxieties:
- “Duck-and-Cover Generation”

Atomic Testing:
The 50s Come to a Close

1959 → Nixon-Khrushchev
“Kitchen Debate”

Cold War ----> Tensions

<------ Technology & Affluence
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.
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.
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